

dissent

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Harold Meyerson on the
Democrats' Identity Crisis /
Heidi Hartmann on **Feminism**
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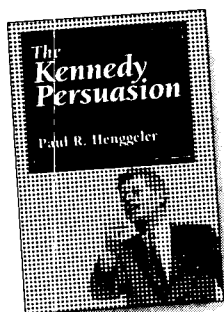
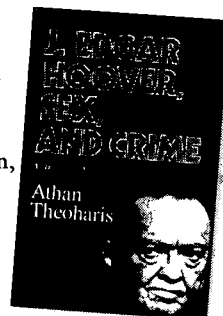


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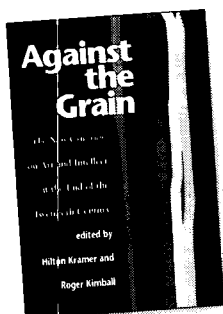
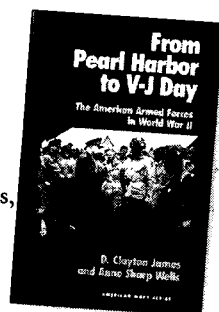
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Editor's Page

The publication schedule of *Dissent* doesn't fit neatly with the political schedule of American democracy—so we were not able to “cover” the electoral disaster of November '94. But the role of a quarterly is, in any case, to reflect on the meaning of such events, and this issue features a series of reflections on America's Right Turn. We can't say that we foresaw the full dimensions of the turn, though we have been worrying about the weakening position of the liberal left for some time. The ideological fervor of the contemporary right is a bit surprising; the strength of the economic interests that the ideology masks is not surprising at all. A fierce populist rhetoric co-exists easily with an extraordinary deference to the wealthy and powerful few. But why is the co-existence so easy? The left's failure is intellectual as well as political.

The right turn is not the result of a mass conversion. It's not the case that large numbers of people changed their political minds last November. Instead, the electorate as a bloc moved rightward, shedding voters on the left (voting rates were down among blacks, organized workers, women, and Jews) and picking up new voters on the right. The actual electorate was something above a third of the potential electorate. The withdrawal of left voters was matched, roughly, by the arrival of right voters—and these two together made the turn. So the populism that Sean Wilentz analyzes and David Bromwich denounces is a minority populism. We don't know the reach of its fears and resentments; we don't know what American politics would look like if 74 percent instead of 37 percent of eligible voters actually voted.

Non-voting on the left reflects larger social facts: the decline of the unions, the virtual collapse of the civil rights movement, the

failure of environmentalists and feminists to produce strong, politically disciplined constituencies. We are watching a radical demobilization of leftist social forces, which leaves large numbers of Americans frighteningly vulnerable to corporate power, increasingly backed by the state. It also leaves liberal politicians beating a hasty retreat. I am not much excited by attacks on their pusillanimity. We will do better to focus on its underlying causes.

Harold Meyerson looks at some of those causes and at the kinds of governmental programs that might reverse their effects. Jeff Isaac proposes a different response to this same problem, writing in the tradition of the old New Left. Both Leo Ribuffo's piece on the politics of right-wing Christian evangelism and Jon Wiener's on talk radio address the revivalism of the right. This revivalism displays the strength of old-fashioned religion, which the left has always disparaged, and the usefulness of old-fashioned technologies, long ago abandoned by the left's political and cultural leaders. How local churches and radio stations fell into the hands of the right is a story yet to be told.

In longer articles in this issue, David Plotke uses the Lani Guinier case to examine contemporary racial politics. Evelyn Brodtkin describes the process that turned the war against poverty into a war against welfare. We will carry more articles on these issues in the Summer and Fall *Dissents*, for the right's mobilization was in large part directed against blacks and welfare recipients. Liberals and leftists will have to defend such vulnerable groups over the coming years, but our larger task is to incorporate them into a new political public, a wider electorate that will be capable, one day, of turning the country again.

—M.W. □



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The Right Turn

Sean Wilentz

POPULISM REDUX

Populism is all the rage in this political season—an enraged and often outrageous populism. Judging from the last election, American voters have hit the boiling point. They hate taxes, big government, and spending on the poor. They hate the Washington political establishment. They hate the smug, liberal cultural elite. In fact, they hate *anything* liberal. They love Rush Limbaugh.

The magnitude of the populist fervor caught some liberal Democrats off guard in November, but the populist mood has actually been building for many years—across the political spectrum. From George Will and William Bennett (unlikely populist types) to Jerry Brown and Jesse Jackson, populism has become a sort of master rhetorical trope, available to all and sundry. A generation ago, the fashionable academic wisdom held that Americans were all, at heart, liberals. (Talk about wishful thinking.) Today it appears that an awful lot of Americans fancy themselves as populists, the angry defenders of the many—“us” (whoever “us” happens to be)—against “them,” the privileged, parasitic, deeply entrenched few.

This pervasive populist sensibility is a byproduct of our democratic heritage. Since the days of the original populist crusader Andrew Jackson, credibility in American politics has usually required cultivating some sort of majoritarian appeal, delivered on behalf of the virtuous people against a supposedly corrupt minority (be it businessmen, slaveholders, Yankee reformers, party bosses, immigrants, segregationists, or welfare cheats). Failing to sustain such an appeal can be politically

fatal—as the Hoover Republicans discovered sixty years ago, as Michael Dukakis (“competence, not ideology”) discovered in 1988, and as other post-sixties Democrats and liberals are only just learning. Even Bill Clinton (by nature a technocrat and a conciliator, not a populist) made sure to deliver some populist sound bites during his run for the presidency in 1992.

Some important distinctions, to be sure, need to be drawn among different kinds of American populism. As the historian C. Vann Woodward has constantly reminded his colleagues, there is no simple American populist lineage: a world of difference separated the down-and-out, democratic Southern dirt farmers who formed the Populist movement of the 1890s from the aggrieved partisans of George C. Wallace in the 1960s. Broadly speaking, there have been two main currents in the populist heritage: an economic populism of the left, directed against business and financial elites and relatively tolerant of ethnic and racial differences; and a cultural populism of the right, directed against liberal elites and cultural minorities, and relatively tolerant of big business. The 1890s Populists, at their best, exemplified the first current; the long succession of American nativist and racist movements, dating back to the 1830s, has exemplified the second.

In his new book *The Populist Persuasion*, Michael Kazin describes how left-wing populism, the dominant current over much of the nineteenth century, has been supplanted in recent decades by its right-wing counterpart. The shift, on Kazin’s view, began in the late 1940s, with the onset of the cold war and the advance of a liberal state that seemed more

interested in the welfare of minorities than in that of any populist majority. Thereafter, the so-called “white backlash” of the 1960s, coupled with the deepening anti-Americanism and third worldist romanticism of large portions of the left, all but destroyed left-wing populism’s legacy. In its place, conservative, big-business Republicans latched on to a new majoritarian appeal, delivered on behalf of the patriotic, pious, hardworking, tax-paying middle class against an unpatriotic, godless, pampered, tax-collecting liberal elite and its lazy, leeching political clients, above all, blacks on welfare.

Yet even Kazin, who writes with authority, could not have fully anticipated the growing complexity and the inventiveness of the right-wing insurgency as it has picked up momentum over the past couple of years. There are, in fact, *several* right-wing populisms at work today, some old, some new, some still in development. Thus far, despite their numerous contradictions and strange alliances, they have managed to hold themselves together under the aegis of the Republican party.

The purest expression of traditional cultural populism, in all its anti-intellectual ferocity, comes today from the right-wing Christian fundamentalists, led by such preachers as Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and Donald Wildmon. Apart from their attacks on the satanic media, none of these populists complains about the economic status quo; rather, it is the irreligious, internationalist liberal elite and its sinning minions—the homosexuals, the feminists, the welfare slackers—who are the Enemy. Having been brought together in the 1970s with the neoconservatives and the *National Review* conservatives, the Christians effectively created their own mass constituency within the GOP, as demonstrated at the fire-and-brimstone Houston convention in 1992. Surviving elements of the old Catholic right (led by Patrick Buchanan) have worked easily enough with the newcomers. More surprisingly, so have the neoconservatives—people who, while defending high culture and Western values against the multicultural left, have also aligned themselves with the creation

scientists, eugenicists, and other charmers of the populist right.

Even more remarkable, over the past couple of years, has been the arrival of fresh varieties of right-wing populism. The firebrand Newt Gingrich, intrepid cultural foe of Big Bird, George McGovern, and the National Endowment for the Arts, now turns out to be an admirer of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (or so he says). And far from being a know-nothing yahoo, the ex-college teacher has pulled together something of a Brain Trust headed by his guru, the futurologist Alvin Toffler. Beneath it all there seems to lie little more than a burning desire to give big business an unfettered hand, beginning with the defense industry establishment. And in the very early days of his tenure as Speaker of the House, Gingrich’s flaky original choice for official House historian showed that his Brain Trust plan had holes in it. Still, in its efforts to embrace even more old-time Democrats and the “gee-whiz,” high-tech suburban young, Gingrichian populism bears watching.

Likewise, the talk-show populists bear listening. Since the 1930s, populist rightwingers in various guises have had a strong presence on the radio dial. But unlike the old-line, uptight cranks and pulpit pounders, the best of the new sensations possess a slick, satirical irony that makes their messages entertaining to baby-boomer and post-baby-boomer audiences. Limbaugh may rail against the counterculture on behalf of what he calls the cultural majority—but he does so with a knowing, self-referential wit not unlike David Letterman’s; and he exhibits an awareness of what’s happening in popular commercial culture, especially in his love for rock ‘n’ roll—easy enough for a man who started out as a rock dee-jay. Even more striking are the cultural permutations of the GOP’s answer to Lenny Bruce—the eternally pissed-off libertarian rocker, Howard Stern, who in the last election championed the death penalty panacea and helped elect George Pataki to the governorship of New York State.

Then there’s Pataki—and more generally the so-called “moderate” Republican governors

like Christine Todd Whitman of New Jersey and William Weld of Massachusetts, who have lately made such a splash. For much of the 1970s and 1980s, it appeared as if what had once been the centrist wing of the Republican party—call it the Rockefeller wing or the Ripon Society wing—had all but disappeared. The agony of moderate Republicanism was most evident in the career of one of its last scions on the national political scene, George Bush—a man who, despite all of his craven pork-rind posturing, could never quite win the hearts of the right-wing populists.

Now, however, a more convincing GOP centrist wing is in place, in tune with the right-wing populist mood. Allergic to the cultural fulminations of the fundamentalist right, the new moderates' moderation consists largely of staking out specific issues on which to be more liberal (usually with a prochoice stance on abortion). But Whitman, Pataki, and others give the populist right enough red meat by noisily endorsing the death penalty. And on economic issues, they exploit the rampant populist mood by fanning the antitax flames and actually delivering on income-tax and business-tax reductions (quietly paid for either with state borrowing or with huge hikes in local property taxes).

Finally, there is the wild card of conservative politics—Ross Perot's schismatic United We Stand America, with its admixture of traditional Republican economics and certain strains of the old economic populism of the left. On the one hand, Perot is the most combative of the deficit hawks, a businessman who preaches the values of big business and who assails government because it does not run like an efficient, profit-maximizing corporation. On the other hand, he has distanced himself from the cultural swamp fevers of the populist right, has attacked (with consummate hypocrisy) the big-business lobbies and special interests, and has stuck up for the little guy with his nationalist-protectionist line on trade.

Against this many-sided, right-wing juggernaut, recent liberal and leftist political efforts have looked scattered and anemic. The person held most responsible is, of course, the president, and not entirely without cause. Too

often, Clinton has appeared to be a highly intelligent policy manager of mostly decent intentions but of uncertain principles and judgment. His administration's own PR efforts have hovered between the lackluster and the disastrous. More important, when faced early on with the task of co-opting Perot's populist supporters, Clinton laid aside his more ambitious campaign promises about stimulating the troubled portions of the economy and turned instead to deficit reduction. The Perotians, by all appearances, weren't terribly impressed; liberal voters, meanwhile, began losing faith in the New Covenant.

Still, the left as a whole has no reason to be proud of *its* performance over the past two years. Whatever can be said about the flaws and compromises of Clinton's health care initiative, for example, it amounted to the boldest effort at humane social legislation since the days of the Great Society. It is conceivable, even likely, that had health care passed the Congress, Gingrich and Company would not be where they are today. So where was everybody when the talking was over and push came to shove? Organized labor turned out, but had already spent some of its best efforts fighting Clinton over the North American Free Trade Agreement. The black movement was going through a scalding series of arguments over anti-Semitism, "street" radicalism, and related cultural issues that, among other things, left the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in a shambles. The academic left, having retreated into identity politics, was virtually silent—as if health care reform was of secondary consequence to impoverished blacks, pregnant teenagers, and people infected with HIV.

In its knee-jerk way, the left has preferred to regard itself in heroic, populist terms that, more and more, partake of sentimental fantasy. The last hurrah of the old left-wing populist tradition may well have been Jesse Jackson's failed Rainbow Coalition. Although he never called himself a populist, Jackson's best efforts went into defending working people of all colors and backgrounds against the business elite, in phrases that were sincere and, at times, moving. But Jackson had his liabilities—the

lingering effects of the “Hymietown” disaster, his unreconstructed third worldist views, his links with Louis Farrakhan, his egotism. In combination, these factors reduced the rainbow’s voting base largely to a single color.

Otherwise, the left-wing populist impulse has looked like a marginal exercise in bewilderment and nostalgia, full of the old moral righteousness but increasingly defensive and rhetorical. Jerry Brown (with his reconnected 1-800 number) attacks corporate greed and praises the working man and working woman, but provides little in the way of substance about dealing with the realities of a post-Keynesian global economy. Organized labor fights back against those realities with an outmoded protectionist nationalism not unlike Perot’s or Buchanan’s. Elsewhere on the left there has been a withdrawal from politics in favor of a kind of left-wing cultural populism (sometimes mistaken for a refurbished modernism)—one that praises art and literature and music either for their “transgressive” qualities or for their alleged popular authenticity, but rarely on the grounds of aesthetic excellence. The traditional right-wing philistinism that promotes Norman Rockwell as a great American painter now has its left-wing counterparts in the hip-hop craze, in “womyn’s art,” and in endless postmodern noodlings about Madonna, Geraldo, and the rest of the idiot culture.

Even more symptomatic of the left’s current state (especially in the academy) is the admixture of anti-majoritarianism and populist currents that casts the United States and the world as a congeries of folkish cultural particularisms. Whereas liberals and leftists once at least aspired to speak for the great masses of American working people, today’s multiculturalists have acquired a stubborn determination to speak as victimized minorities, projecting a weird combination of resentment and celebration at being the Other, outside the white-straight-male American cultural norms. Once again, ironically, left and right end up mirroring each other—for both sides agree on what the American norms actually are. And on the basis of that

agreement, the right wins the political battle every time.

Left-wing populism, in short, has turned into a credo of political escapism, a vehicle for liberals and leftists to opt out of real-life politics while feeling tragically virtuous. Many of those who fall under the populist spell get lured into various doomed political enterprises, whether in organizing some new left-wing third party or fourth party or in hoping that Jesse Jackson will *finally* get his act together.

Meanwhile, ample room remains to develop a different sort of majoritarian politics, relevant to the global order of the 1990s (not the 1890s, or 1930s, or 1960s) and focused on the glaring and growing inequalities that divide the rich and powerful from the rest of us. The Republicans, after all, did not exactly win a thumping majority of the electorate’s votes last November, even from those voters who bothered to go to the polls. Surveys show that Americans distrust conservative business leaders as much as (or even more than) they do liberal political leaders. And there are endless possibilities to expose and widen the fissures in the GOP coalition. (Here’s a start: *Dissent* cordially invites Jerry Falwell to comment on George Pataki’s flack Howard Stern and on the New Year’s Eve orgy that Stern aired on pay-per-view.)

Some serious and sympathetic Clinton Democrats—Robert Reich and Laura Tyson are among them—have been struggling to revive majoritarian politics. We may have our differences with some of their premises and conclusions (although who’s to say, given the shaky state of our own). Still, these Democrats recognize that without some fundamental structural reforms, the nation’s cities and its industrial base will continue to disintegrate, with disastrous consequences for working people and the nation at large—and they are trying to do something about it. (They need all the help they can get; they need our best advice and criticism; and, when the chips are down, they, and not the left-wing populists, deserve our support.) Likewise, there are signs, especially in the academy and on its fringes, that at least some left-of-center Americans are weary of the multiculturalist vogue and of the inbred,

insulated “progressive” politics that have led nowhere, year after year, for more than two decades.

It may not be too late to salvage and

modernize the nobler traces of the old populist tradition for the next century. If these efforts fail, the only populism that will matter will be the populism of our worst political foes. □

Harold Meyerson

IDENTITY CRISIS FOR THE DEMOCRATS

The problem is, the problem isn't just Bill Clinton. Fault the president for his timing and tactics on health care, for subordinating his investment agenda to deficit-reduction mania. But it was hardly Clinton's doing that Kathleen Brown changed identities every week; that Mario Cuomo had no rationale for serving one more term; that Tom Foley, Dan Rostenkowski, and Jack Brooks, with 110 years of congressional seniority, couldn't coax more than a handful of foot soldiers to walk their districts; that Democrats across the land last November drifted themelessly toward oblivion. The Democrats' identity crisis is every bit as profound at the bottom as at the top, maybe more so. How many Democratic-run states or cities can liberals point to with pride?

Even before November's landslide, the economic and political terrain was becoming unrecognizable—though for some, it may have had a ghostly familiarity. For in several crucial aspects, America has reverted to a pre-New Deal condition. Economic growth is concentrated within the wealthiest fifth of the nation. The Democrats preside over a recovery in which average household income continues to decline. Most critically, they no longer seem able (or in some cases, willing) to use government to spread the growth more equitably. Accordingly, hard times no longer mean that voters turn to the Democrats for solutions. The Democrats have precious few solutions; the Republicans have none, but they're masters

at exploiting the resentments that simmer in a solutionless world.

Which is why the most downwardly mobile economically are the most rightwardly mobile politically. The Democrats are holding their own among the symbolic analysts: there was no falloff from 1992 to 1994 in the level of support for House Democrats among college graduates. Among high school grads, though, their vote fell by 10 percent; among voters with some college, by 11 percent. And among white males, who increasingly saw the Democrats as the tribunes for every group in American society except themselves, the party's support collapsed. From 1986 through 1992, white male support for Democratic House candidates ranged from 47 percent to 49 percent. Last November, it skidded to 37 percent.

The only impediment to the rightward leap of white males remains unions: union household members voted 14 percent more Democratic than nonunion household members last year, and white male union household members 18 percent more Democratic than their nonunion counterparts. Union membership, however, continues to decline: in the 1994 network exit poll, respondents from union households constituted just 14 percent of the sample, down from 26 percent in 1984. Ironically, as union membership wanes, the effect of membership on political consciousness waxes. Blue-collar white male union members view government more favorably than their nonunion equiva-

lents. Those equivalents, according to polling conducted for the AFL-CIO, make up the demographic group most hostile to unions and unionizing. For all but the unionized sector of the white working class, the Democrats are the party, and the unions the movement, that have abandoned them to the market while championing virtually everyone else.

These antipathies are even greater among Perot voters—the distinct if overlapping group with whom the Democrats had to forge some alliances if they ever entertained notions of converting the '92 victory into a lasting realignment. At best, Clinton got some of the words right in his approach to the Perotistas, but none of the music. They wanted resolution and got endless chatter. They wanted economic nationalism and got a dash of nationalism in a cauldron of corporate globalism.

The tragedy here is that the strategic basis for a progressive Democratic-Perot alliance was clear—and clearly ignored. Like Democratic voters, Perot supporters told pollsters they mistrusted corporations. Like Democratic voters, they greatly desired political reform. On one key question in the 1992 exit polls, they provided an identical profile to Democrats: asked whether they thought foreign trade tended to create more jobs or destroy them, Perot voters and Clinton voters, by identical 49-percent-to-35-percent margins, said that it destroyed more jobs. (By a 56-percent-to-27 percent margin, Bush votes said it creates more jobs.)

But political reform fell victim to the Democratic barons of the Hill. Anticorporate rhetoric, let alone anticorporate reform, was squelched by economic adviser (now Treasury Secretary) Robert Rubin. A foreign trade policy that placed the interests of workers first was trampled by the elite stampede to the North American Free Trade Agreement. (The herd included the Democratic Leadership Council [DLC], which argued that winning the Perot voters was the sine qua non of Democratic strategy—except when it conflicted with the wishes of the DLC's corporate benefactors.) This meant that the Democrats' outreach to the Perot forces consisted of deficit reduction only—which the DLC's own polling had

concluded was far from the Perotistas' foremost concern. For the Perot voters, as for the stagnant or downwardly mobile middle and working class, the Democrats had offered no solutions. And last November, all their rage was mobilized by the right.

The meaning of November, the Republican right contends, is that the Reagan Revolution has been validated. For whatever small consolation it affords the left, that's not quite right. The policy changes that November engendered are surely Reaganesque, but that's not what the voters were opting for. (By a margin of 49 percent to 40 percent, exit poll respondents said they preferred current economic policies to Reagan's.) The specter stalking the November vote wasn't Reagan's. It was Nixon's.

Many of Nixon's greatest hits—racial backlash, wedge issues that split the Democratic base, identification of Democratic elites with dangerous elements—loomed large in 1994, and are likely to loom larger in 1996. The prospects for a Nixon revival have never been better. Suppose, for instance, that a neo-Nixonian chances upon a DLC-sponsored poll of independent voters taken just after the November vote. He sees that their first priority for government, by a margin of 64 percent, is to protect Social Security and Medicare. He sees that their second priority, by a margin of 60 percent, is to cut government spending. What these voters crave, our Nixonite concludes, is some unworthy *them* against whom these cuts can safely be made: immigrants, welfare recipients, foreign nations.

What 1994 demonstrated was that Republicans could scapegoat in a world without communism. It had been touch and go for a few years there, what with the evil empire crumbled to dust and new foreign menaces like Saddam Hussein too ephemeral to affect voting behavior. By 1994 though, the Republicans had resurrected some enemies within—and none more ably than California governor Pete Wilson.

If there were any doubts that Republicans could navigate through hard times more adeptly

than their post-New Deal Democratic rivals, Wilson's campaign against Kathleen Brown should have dispelled them. Between 1990 and 1993—that is, through most of Wilson's first term as governor—average annual household income in California declined by a stunning 14.5 percent. But Brown never convinced voters that Wilson was responsible for this decline (and indeed, he largely wasn't) or that she or any Democratic governor could use the government to turn the economy around (as indeed they largely couldn't).

Wilson, by contrast, was busily arguing that the money diverted to illegal immigrants was the major factor in the schools' failure to produce a generation of Einsteins and Kants. It wasn't much of an argument, but it was enough of one to provide a pretense of respectability to voters who simply didn't wish to continue the public funding of illegal immigrants at all. The Wilson-backed Proposition 187 passed by a 59-percent-to-41-percent margin, cutting deeply into the Democratic base. African-Americans rejected the measure by a narrow 53-percent-to-47-percent margin; in the two heavily black Los Angeles city council districts where competition with Latino immigrants is the fiercest, the measure passed with 51.5 percent support. Exploiting the crime and immigration issues, and his opponent's ineptness, Wilson overcame a twenty-point deficit to win reelection by fifteen points. He even won an implausible 20 percent of the black vote—a clear spillover from the vote on Proposition 187.

Even as Sons-of-187 move into other states and Republican National Chairman Haley Barbour touts anti-immigration efforts as key to Republican campaigns in 1996, the California right is readying another killer initiative for that year, this one intended to end state affirmative action and minority set-aside programs. The wars on welfare, affirmative action and immigrants give the Republicans three strong wedge issues they can run on two years hence—splitting the Democrats' base, vexing the Democrats' candidates (is there a position they can take on affirmative action that won't cost them votes?), exploiting anxieties the Democrats seem unable to address through economic programs.

Other elements of the Republicans' agenda, including much of their Contract with America, may prove less popular. As Republicans have already recognized, there is little public support for increased defense spending. (The notion of restarting Star Wars to defend against an army that has taken months to shoot its way into downtown Grozny seems downright eccentric.) A number of the Republican tax proposals currently being floated, such as Dick Armey's flat tax on wages and pensions, exempting all income from interest, dividends and capital gains, seem vulnerable even to inept Democratic attack. And Democrats can only pray that Republicans decide to push such items on the corporate agenda as denying overtime rates to full-time "temp" workers forced to put in more than forty hours a week.

Indeed, a January *Los Angeles Times* poll finds that on many pending issues, the public takes the Clinton, not the Gingrich, position. Americans want to retain the ban on assault weapons, preserve the National Service Corps; maintain the balance of prevention, police, and prison funding in the 1994 crime bill; and create public sector jobs for people going off welfare if no private sector jobs are available. Then again, people supported the key particulars of the Clinton health plan—universal coverage and employer mandates—which, of course, were never enacted.

But derailing some or even much of the Contract is still no guarantee of Democratic success. (It may be a harbinger of Republican failure, but that may merely open up space for some other right-of-center forces.) Even if the Toffler-babble is cleared away, the foundation of the Republican ascendancy remains. It has little to do with the third wave, and everything to do with the manipulation of resentment at a time when the Democrats are unable to arrest the downward drift of the middle class.

In the Good Old Days of the New Deal Order, when economies were national and rising incomes the rule, the Democrats could promote economic opportunity and security in four ways. The Social Security Act created old-age pensions and unemployment insurance to

bolster purchasing power. The GI Bill and federal aid to education provided more avenues for training and mobility. The Federal Reserve, depending on who ran it, was a buffer against too sharp an economic downturn. And unions, abetted by wage-and-hour legislation, guaranteed that the benefits of economic growth would be widely distributed throughout the society.

The Democrats' dilemma is that they can currently pursue policies of greater economic opportunity and security with only one of these strategies. The handiwork of the Social Security Act itself looks safe, but there's no opportunity to expand social insurance with such policies as national health, and little prospect of preserving other safety nets, like AFDC. The Federal Reserve has become a relentless foe of higher wages. Unions have weakened to the point where wage increases seem a thing of the past.

That leaves training as the one area where the Democrats still attempt to promote the general welfare—making it easier to attend college, improving access to job training, and the like. Clinton has made some shrewd proposals in this area; so has Dick Gephardt. But they are not enough. The Democrats cannot arrest the downward slide of most American incomes by training alone. Indeed, millions of Americans are still over-qualified for the jobs they hold.

Moreover, neither training nor job creation nor a strong recovery, even in durable-goods manufacturing and construction, has made a dent in the what is emerging as the most immutable element of the New Age economy: stagnating wages. In 1993—the second year of a recovery—the average annual household income fell by \$312. In 1994, with economic growth roaring ahead at 4 percent, wages and benefits rose by a mere 3 percent, the lowest annual increase since the government began measuring it in 1981. In a globalized economy and a de-unionized America, wages and incomes have simply decoupled from other indices of economic strength.

Which means that if they confine their efforts to training alone, the Democrats have no way to arrest the middle-class slide and allay

the attendant anxiety that the right will surely exploit. They must attempt to shore up the other three legs on which their economic security platform rests:

- The Fed: Alan Greenspan is up for reconfirmation in 1996. The financial community will support him; but much of the non-financial business community—certainly, construction and manufacturing—will join labor in opposing him. Greenspan and Clinton have been engaged in the most delicate *pas de deux* since shortly before Clinton's inaugural; but it's both good politics and sound economics to wrest the Fed from this Ayn Rand acolyte and place it in more Keynesian hands. And if ever a left-wing campaign was made for talk radio, it's the war on the Fed—this secretive, semipublic, semiprivate, and utterly unaccountable agent of finance capital.

- This clearly isn't the moment to enhance social insurance directly, but neither is it the moment to cut back on a popular universal social insurance program, which is precisely what the Republicans are proposing to do with Medicare. As I write, Gingrich has begun to go after Medicare as a dinosaur—a one-size-fits-all, inflexible government behemoth. In fact, Medicare offers its users complete freedom of choice in physicians and facilities. Ironically, while Gingrich is launching his bogus attack, bureaucratization and cutbacks in care are absolutely rehsaping American medicine—but it's happening in the private sector, where HMOs, currently drowning in profits, have clearly become the dominant player. (This year in California, the percentage of insured residents enrolled in HMOs is at 47 percent and rising fast.) All the antibureaucratic rhetoric that was adduced against the Clinton Plan should be turned against the HMOs, and their green-eyeshade CEOs, who are shortening hospital stays and cutting back on care in the cause of greater profits. Medicine is being collectivized—and we have the opportunity to raise the issue of who controls the decisions; an HMO patients' bill of rights is a good place to start.

- There is no evidence that the Democrats can arrest the decline of national incomes with a union movement that comprises just 11

percent of the private sector. (And given the differential in voting between union members and nonmembers, there is no evidence the Democrats can win many elections with a movement of that size, either.) It is in the party's longterm strategic interest to block the Republicans' coming attempts to relegalize company unions and end the payment of prevailing wages on federal construction projects. It's in the Democrats' interest to pursue Gephardt's proposal to link corporate tax cuts to a corporation's treatment of its employees. Beyond that, the Democrats must insist on reforming labor law the next time they're in power to enable unions to organize again, just as unions must learn again both how to organize and how to reconnect with a public that supports their purposes, but cringes at their institutional face.

● Finally, the Democrats must append a fifth leg to their economic platform that wasn't so necessary during their New Deal ascendancy because the economy was still largely national. They must tilt their trade policy away from banks and corporations that have an interest in depressing wages abroad, toward policies that enhance wages abroad—vesting transnational labor bodies with greater power, placing more emphasis on human rights and workers' ability to organize.

One thing is certain: if the Democrats cannot deliver prosperity anymore, the Republicans will not hesitate to promise purity—to divide the nation between worthy and unworthy recipients of state support. The GOP has its divisions over some of its more egregious wedge campaigns—Jack Kemp, William Bennett and the *Wall Street Journal* opposed Proposition 187—but in its war on welfare and affirmative action, it is effectively united.

The Democrats know no such unity. The House leadership at least, Gephardt and David Bonior, have made clear that they know the party must pursue class-based policies only, drawing a line between their working- and middle-class constituents and the wealthier beneficiaries of the Republicans' largesse every bit as clear as the lines the Republicans draw between the races. But—and Gephardt and Bonior seem

to understand this—if they can only offer training incentives to their newfound working class, their appeal will be sadly muted.

When he promotes his Middle Class Bill of Rights, Bill Clinton seems to understand the necessity for drawing class lines, too. And then the subject changes, and that understanding seems to recede. It was nowhere in evidence in Clinton's deliberations on the Mexican bailout. The Fed has raised interest rates seven times in the past year, and has yet to experience a presidential rebuke. And beyond Clinton lurk still fuzzier figures like Bob Kerrey, convinced that the role of the party should be to de-emphasize class distinctions and to scale back universal and universally popular entitlements the better to calm the deficit nightmares of financial elites.

Like all party leaders, Clinton has reached the top in part because he straddles many of his party's internal divisions, because he reflects in his priorities the balance of power within party ranks. Unfortunately for Clinton, and the Democrats, and the nation, the party may have reached the point where those forces arrayed behind policies that promote income growth—above all, unions—are too weak to sway the party in its basic policies. (And I'm not suggesting that the unions would be any stronger if they left the party and started one of their own.)

The Democrats have always been the world's preeminent cross-class party—but in a period of rising inequality and declining

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incomes, that may be less a blessing than a curse. It was one thing to be the party of Averill Harman and Walter Reuther in a time of shared prosperity, quite another to be the party of Robert Rubin and Richard Trumka in a time of investment boom and wage stagnation. On fundamen-

tal economic questions, the Democratic party has become a house divided against itself. It still will stand—for election, anyway—but until it tilts decisively toward a wage-earner's perspective, there's little likelihood that it will more than occasionally prevail. □

Heidi Hartmann

FEMINISM AFTER THE FALL

What are women to do in today's political climate? More specifically, what should the organizations that represent them in Washington do for the next two years? In my view, the task for the women's movement is clear. The task is to speak up clearly and loudly to affirm women's rights to full participation in the economy, polity, and society.

Polls show that women are generally more progressive than men, they support an active government and more generous help for the poor, and are more likely to say they are willing to pay higher taxes to achieve their objectives. In short, women are the perfect supporters of activist Democratic politicians, and, particularly in 1980 when the Republican party moved to the right, abandoning its long-standing support for women's rights, women moved to the Democratic party in droves. In 1992 they elected President Clinton; in 1994, they failed to come out in their usual numbers. Those who did gave only a light majority of their votes to Democrats, reducing their support for Democratic candidates substantially compared to past levels.

Polls also show clearly what women want; it's not a mystery anymore. What they want is more money. They work as hard as men and they want to get paid as much as men. They want pay equity, opportunity for advancement, and respect on the job. For at least the past five years, in poll after poll, this bread-and-butter issue has headed

the list of women's demands. As a friend of mine says, "Girls just want to have funds."

In his first two years in office, President Clinton did little explicitly for women, and virtually nothing on the economic issues closest to their hearts. Most women's organizations failed to confront him on his lack of responsiveness; their leaders preferred to cooperate with our first prochoice president in twelve years, believing they could get more for women by playing as insiders than as outsiders. With women's leaders flocking to his side without demanding much in return, President Clinton and the Democratic party have been able to take women's support for granted. But this election cycle, rank-and-file women across the country took a look at what was happening for them—not much—and took time out.

Now, in the face of a graver threat than simply a sometimes supportive, sometimes indifferent Democratic president, namely an actively anti-women, Republican-led Congress, some groups are beginning to realize that to get women's agendas acted upon, perhaps simply to defend the rights women have won, they must mobilize women. They must organize their grass roots, elect pro-women candidates, and hold politicians accountable—Democrats as well as Republicans.

But just as the Democratic party is unclear about whether to reaffirm its agenda and solidify its traditional base or to continue its

drift to the right, pursuing the path of me-tooism, so too are women's organizations conflicted. Some would proclaim their feminist ideals and mobilize their followers through militant tactics, while others would soften their appeal to try to appeal to moderate, centrist women. It seems that many women's groups fear that standing up and demanding equality instead of begging for it will brand them as members of the lunatic fringe. They seem still to want to be players, attempting to tinker at the margin of the new conservative agenda. They don't seem to realize that the new guys in town don't want to let them in the game.

With the ideological battle lines so clearly drawn, women must defend activist government at the national level, demand regulation of such corporate abuses as unequal pay and pervasive discrimination against women, and insist upon their rights to safe and legal abortion and to an environment free of violence perpetrated by men. A states-rights, free-market agenda will never be a women's agenda.

It's not too late for the women's movement to get its act together; indeed there are some signs that it is doing so. The Council of Presidents, the Washington-based organization that represents the leaders of some ninety-five national groups that work on women's issues,* is beginning to forge ways to enable it to respond collectively to critical issues, despite a historically weak, confederated structure. Other groups are working to link and mobilize women's advocates active at the state level into a national network, while yet others are linking grass-roots groups of activists—welfare mothers, poor people, immigrants, and

workers. JEDI Women (Justice, Economic Dignity and Independence for Women), a grass-roots Utah group of welfare rights activists, successfully mobilized similar groups to undertake marches, speak outs, and demonstrations protesting actual and proposed cutbacks in welfare at approximately seventy-five locations across the nation on February 14. The Council of Presidents supported the activities in Washington and set forth its fundamental principles for meaningful welfare reform, deriding the current proposals for failing to meet them: child care, health care and educational opportunity, reproductive rights, child support enforcement, access to better jobs, and real assistance that provides an escape from poverty.

Nor is it too late for the Democrats. The president has shown some gumption in going after a substantial increase in the minimum wage, a policy that will help women disproportionately, because nearly two-thirds of minimum wage workers are women. While the president floated his trial balloon, women's groups actively lobbied him and his administration to hold it high and keep it aloft. He'll have to do a lot more than this, however, to win back women's votes. In the meantime, let's hope women are building their base, not just to reelect Bill if he deserves it, or to bring the next Congress into pro-women hands, but to exercise power themselves.

To quote Irene Natividad, Chair of the National Commission on Working Women, we must, as a first step, "challenge the atmosphere of compliance." Unless we take that first step to speak out strongly and clearly, we let Newt win the battle and the right wing win the war. □

* An organization of which this author is a member.

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Jon Wiener

LOOKING FOR THE LEFT'S LIMBAUGH

T

he right dominates talk radio; the left has been singularly unsuccessful in this medium. Does it have to be that way? Rush Limbaugh is on the radio three hours a day (noon to three in the Eastern Time zone), five days a week, on 648 stations with an estimated audience of twenty million people who hear him at least once a week; he claims that more than four million are listening at any given moment. Most of Limbaugh's listeners are white males—aggressive and resentful. His raucous, loudmouthed, bullying style expresses their anger and gives form to their inchoate resentments: the source of their problems is not insecurity about their future in a precarious job market—it is Hillary Clinton and the dope-smoking, counterculture-infested liberal press. He manages to make this unlikely argument sound convincing by mobilizing the magic of the medium, a task the left has somehow failed to master.

Listening to Rush in December, I found that male bonding occupies a significant place on his program. One Monday morning Rush began the show, "Hey, how about those Pittsburgh Steelers? . . . I haven't been this up in ten years, other than my wedding day."

Among the other qualities contributing to Limbaugh's success, meanness is at the top of the list: "Everyone knows the Clintons have a cat," he said on his television show in 1993. "Socks is the White House cat. But did you know there is a White House dog?" Then he put up a picture of thirteen-year-old Chelsea Clinton. He does a lot of demagogic name-calling, ridiculing his opponents as "environmental wackos," "feminazis," "long-haired maggot-infested dope-smoking peace pansies," and "the spaced-out Hollywood left."

Humor is one of Rush's most effective weapons. I heard a bit with a Clinton sound-alike, advertising "The White House Basement Shopping Network: get the original edition of my core beliefs—plus a rare photo of me and Ho Chi Minh. These priceless treasures are available for a limited time only when you subscribe to the weekly White House Core Beliefs Newsletter—if you want to know what the core beliefs are on a minute-to-minute basis." Rush's humor includes a self-deprecating version of his own megalomania: "Hard-hitting, intense, penetrating," he says: "I'll tell you folks, we're hot! I'm sitting here in eager, uncontrolled anticipation, ready to take your calls." For a while last year he promoted the anti-abortion cause through what he termed "caller abortions"—unwanted callers would be drowned out by the sound of a vacuum cleaner, accompanied by a tiny scream. He thought this was hilarious (although he doesn't seem to be doing it any more).

His principal targets, along with the Clintons, are "the elite liberal media"—including television news and *Time* magazine. On one show he denounced Sam Donaldson for saying that the "new media" were just shouting opinions and didn't get their facts straight. "We need to grant Sam a scholarship," Rush said. "He needs to attend class at the Institute of Advanced Conservative Studies [Limbaugh's term for his show]. This program can save Sam Donaldson."

And he ridiculed *Time* magazine for naming the pope its "Man of the Year." "The anti-abortion pope? The homophobic pope?

The sexist pope? The white European male pope? The pope who doesn't believe in condoms, who won't modify the religion to please the sinners? The pope on the cover, as Man of the Year? It should be Mr. Newt, but we can't honor him, we just had him on the cover as Mr. Scrooge." The next day he argued that he himself should have been *Time's* Man of the Year, instead of the pope: "The dope-smoking, welfare-coddling counterculture-infested liberal media don't get it: Rush and Newt blew the trumpets that tumbled the walls of America's moral darkness. Didn't they see all those new Republican congressmen at the orientation genuflect as Rush walked into the room? They couldn't have been more impressed if he had walked in on water."

There's one other element in the success of Limbaugh: the ability of a radio show to form a community, made up of people who take pride in belonging to the program. Limbaugh's fans—who call themselves "Dittoheads"—don't just listen to him; they take a vicarious pride in his accomplishments; they love him. Callers typically begin "Mega-dittos to you, Rush." He takes exceptional pains to cultivate the Dittohead phenomenon, and here his relentless self-promotion pays off.

How should progressives fight Limbaugh's testosterone-fueled meanness, name-calling, and humor? The *New Republic* and FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) each launched a campaign last summer to expose his errors and lies. This masochistic exercise required listening to Rush for weeks and fact-checking his pronouncements. Example: when Limbaugh debated environmental issues with then-Senator Al Gore on ABC's *Nightline*, he said "Mount Pinatubo has put 570 times the amount of chlorine into the atmosphere in one eruption than all of the man-made chlorofluorocarbons in one year." According to FAIR, the source that Limbaugh relied on—a book by Dixie Lee Ray, former governor of Washington and chair of the Atomic Energy Commission—actually said it was an eruption of Mount Augustine in Alaska in 1976 that put out 570 times as much chlorine as one year's

worth of CFCs; her source was a 1980 article in *Science* magazine, but it turns out the eruption of Mount Augustine described there occurred not in 1976 but 700,000 years ago.

This anti-Limbaugh campaign got considerable press coverage and provided useful ammunition to liberal columnists; the *Wall Street Journal* had to run an op-end column by William Bennett dutifully defending Limbaugh against the charges of inaccuracies. But somehow Rush survived this scrutiny, and his greatest triumphs came after the efforts of FAIR and *TNR*. Limbaugh's fans don't care. They love his act. They listen for entertainment, not for accurate information. The left has to do more than expose his errors: it has to challenge his ideas in a language ordinary people can understand and—equally important—a language they can enjoy.

Why has the left been so unsuccessful at this task? Some argue that "the right has simple solutions, we are too honest for that, our message is more complex." Talk radio in this view fosters not just the simplistic but also the demagogic; its format is inherently inimical to serious analysis—especially analysis that challenges conventional modes of thought. In the words of Victor Navasky, publisher and editorial director of the *Nation*, "Radio is a sound bite medium, and the left does not have a sound bite program."

The right has an idea—not a good or humane idea, but an idea nonetheless, simple and clear: government is the problem, the "free market" provides the solution; traditional values are the answer to every social problem. Harold Meyerson, executive editor of the *L.A. Weekly*, who had his own weekly radio program on public radio in Santa Monica for more than three years, says that "the right has its catechism in order, but the broad left is much less secure and more uncertain, other than its 'core values.'"

The left has been unsuccessful also for a different reason: "a lack of respect for popular culture and popular communication," says Danny Goldberg, president of the ACLU of Southern California, and chairman and CEO of Warner Brothers Records. "The left has been occupied with the intellectual framing of their positions," he says, "and has had a bit of

snobbery toward ordinary language.” But “the popular media provide the means of communication. Why this has eluded the left is a mystery.”

Jeff Cohen, executive director of FAIR, makes a different argument: “There are a lot of phony excuses for why the right wing dominates,” he told the *New York Times*, “but the most obvious, true explanation is that the management at these stations is conservative.”

Despite these problems, could the left do better in talk radio? “There’s no reason why the only people who succeed in this medium should be on the right,” says Goldberg. “It’s entertainment—Limbaugh would be the first to concede that—and there are great entertainers on the left.” And although some leftist ideas do depend on unfamiliar or complex arguments, others are simple truths: conservative programs benefit a small number of very rich people. That shouldn’t be so hard to convey. Perhaps the biggest problem, Goldberg says, is that “we are primarily selling hope, while talk radio thrives on anger and negativity. But we need to direct that anger where it should be directed. That’s the challenge.”

Since the November election, liberals and the left have responded to this challenge by looking for someone to put on the air against Limbaugh. The conversations range widely. One approach is find someone to compete for Rush’s audience—white, male and populist—somebody funny and brash, who could focus their anger with an antibusiness ideology instead of a pro-market one—somebody like Michael Moore, the big working-class guy from *Flint* who made the hit documentary *Roger and Me*. His summer television show on NBC, *TV Nation*, was terrific, undoubtedly the most left-wing thing ever seen on network television. Moore hates big business with sincere passion, and knows how to make that passion into entertainment: standing outside IBM corporate headquarters in Manhattan with a bullhorn and a laptop computer, he shouted up toward the top floor, “Louis Gerstner, president of IBM, do you know how to format a floppy disk? Take the *TV Nation* challenge!”

Many others have been mentioned. Mario Cuomo was offered a daily radio talk show by

Edward McLaughlin, the driving force behind Limbaugh. Cuomo is certainly the most eloquent of the liberal Democrats; and he’s also a white man from Queens. Jerry Brown has a two-hour weekday talk show on thirty stations. Others mentioned include Molly Ivins and Ann Richards, tough feminists with biting wit. (Richards said of George Bush, Jr., “His father’s got four names, but he’s only got three—he’s missing his Herbert.”)

The left does have one substantial challenger to Rush Limbaugh: Jim Hightower, the populist former agriculture commissioner of Texas, whose three-hour program *Hightower Radio* is broadcast on 140 ABC network stations Saturday and Sunday, starting at 1 P.M. Eastern Time; WABC in New York City started carrying it in January. “I’ve been in this business for twenty years, and this is the first time I’ve seen someone get this many stations this fast,” ABC Radio vice president for programming Frank Raphael told the *Boston Globe*.

On the show, which began broadcasting last May, Hightower makes the most of his East Texas twang and a steady pulse of country music. He begins the show by announcing that he is “broadcasting from KBET, above the Chat and Chew cafe in Austin, Texas, where there are more musicians than lawyers, more VWs than BMWs—my kind of town.” On his first show after the Republican congressional session opened, Hightower declared, “rooty-toot-toot, here comes the Newt: the same old money-grubbing special interest butt-kisser.” He attacked the “establishment media” for ignoring the most important story of the week, the Republicans’ killing a proposed ban on gifts from lobbyists. “It’s outright bribery,” he said. “Maybe their votes aren’t being bought, but they’re being leased, don’t you think? It’s a gravy train with biscuit wheels, but we’re the ones getting railroaded.” Over chugging train sound effects, he asked, “This is change?”

He played Ray Benson’s song “You’ve Got To Dance with Them that Brung You,” and then listed the biggest corporate contributors to leading Republicans: “There’s Bob Dole doing

the do-si-do with the insurance industry; there's Alfonse D'Amato slow-dancing cheek to cheek with the bankers." Pointing out that it would have been Elvis's 60th birthday that day, he played Elvis's "Money Honey"—"the song for both political parties," he said, "Problem is, we have one party in Washington—the money party."

Hightower draws on the elements that work so well for Limbaugh: a distinctive voice, a mixture of anger, sarcasm, and humor—but the simple themes that he hammers home are populist: "Always follow the money: there's no reform until there is lobbying reform and campaign reform. Corporate welfare is five times bigger than people's welfare. And keep your eye on the Newt—he's a slimy little lizard."

Hightower has one additional crucial accomplishment: he has shown that a voice from the left can win commercial sponsors. His include Anacin, Goodyear tires, Ovaltine, and AT&T telephones. At this point, Hightower's just-a-country-boy persona is the best the left has going on the radio.

There was a time when a left-wing populist talker dominated the media: Will Rogers in the early thirties. Rush Limbaugh is nothing compared to Will Rogers. He had the most widely read newspaper column in the country and a radio program—which together reached forty million people; and he was the number-one box office draw in the movies at the same time. During those years he spoke with a clear and generous populist voice. "You know," he wrote in a 1931 appeal for the unemployed—who made up 25 percent of the population—"not a one of us has anything that these people—that are without now—haven't contributed to what we've got. There is not an unemployed man in the country that hasn't contributed to the wealth of every millionaire in America." The *New York Sun* wrote in the mid-thirties that Will Rogers "gives the impression that the country is filled with such sages, wise with years, young in humor and love of life, shrewd yet gentle. He is what Americans think other Americans are like." The contrast to our Age of Limbaugh couldn't be clearer. Hightower is trying to

don the folksy mantle of Will Rogers; it may not work as well in this media-saturated age.

In the search for a left Limbaugh, progressives are making a basic error: trying to find a writer or thinker or public figure whose achievements are well known. That isn't where Limbaugh came from. He wasn't a conservative pundit or politico when he started his program; nobody had ever heard of him. He spent a decade as a Top 40 deejay, bouncing from station to station in the Midwest. That's how he learned the medium of radio. Then, after years of practice, he got hold of a couple of elemental right-wing ideas, and mobilized the skills he had mastered to put them across in this medium.

"Talk radio is not just talking," says Harry Shearer, whose weekly hour-long satirical radio program "Le Show" plays on more than seventy-five public stations and has just begun its twelfth year. "It's not just expressing ideas into a microphone—it requires skills that are specific to the medium." Those skills start with a trained radio voice. Limbaugh has developed an instantly-recognizable voice and vocal style—he belongs to the booming, bombastic school, tempered by an effective dose of ironic self-deprecation. The second radio skill Limbaugh mastered was how to pace a broadcast, how to make conversations move. In AM radio, with its torrents of ads, pacing is everything. Much of his material is incredibly ponderous, but because he learned entertainment values, he makes it listenable. "That's a professional skill," says Shearer. "It has to do with how he talks and the way he uses time."

Limbaugh's training paid off in another way. It used to be that conservatives were old people who listened to Paul Harvey. Since Reagan, you may have noticed, the demographics have changed: the conservative ranks today include millions of young people. Many of them who would never put up with Pat Robertson or Pat Buchanan get a kick out of Limbaugh because of his immersion in Baby Boomer pop culture—which he blends with right-wing ideology in a way that can only be called brilliant. Nobody had put these disparate forces together until Limbaugh came along.

Thus he has great fun redoing classic rock hits with antiliberal lyrics: he turned the Beach Boys' "Little Old Lady from Pasadena" into an anti-Hillary tirade, "The Little First Lady with Megalomania." He made Dion's "The Wanderer" into "The Philanderer," sung by a woozy Ted Kennedy sound-alike. To celebrate the firing of Joycelyn Elders, he played songs that seem to be about masturbation: Michael Jackson's "Beat It" and Chuck Berry's "My Ding-a-Ling."

While Limbaugh has mastered this electronic medium, "the left is technophobic as a matter of religion," says Shearer. "In antiwar circles, suggesting anything more modern than 'let's get a bunch of people into the streets' was

regarded as cooptation by the media. The right talks a good game about distrusting the media, but they use it like crazy—they're on satellite, and they're online. Meanwhile the left is still sending out flyers with 'labor donated' on the bottom."

An effective left voice to combat Rush Limbaugh's on talk radio is unlikely to be found among our leading progressive writers or political thinkers. Danny Goldberg put it succinctly: "If you want to know how to do radio, you find radio people." Rush came from the ranks of unknown toilers on local AM stations—that's where to look for the left's Limbaugh. □

David Bromwich

FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS

In all the discussion of sending the children of welfare mothers to orphanages, it seems to have escaped attention that an immoral use of the English language is involved. An orphan has never meant anything but a child whose parents are dead. We are now asked to apply the same word orphan to a child whose parents are living. Neither in Dickens nor in any other writer or speaker of English before Newt Gingrich is there a precedent for this shocking transposition of feelings. But the Speaker of the House chose his word with craft, and knew that his coinage would answer a need of his audience.

As, under the proposed policy, children are to be snatched from unwilling mothers by order of the state, we want a way of assuring ourselves that what we are doing is natural. It would be natural if the mother did not exist. So, by the expansion of a single word the living mother is written out of existence. Having

taken her off the welfare rolls in society, we balance our books by taking her off the human rolls in language. For how many other classes of persons will we soon be requiring language to perform a similar service?

The new moral bookkeepers ought to be asked a pragmatic question now and then. Conceive of a mother of three children who is not especially successful at holding a job but who loves and cares for her children. How will you explain the remanding of the children into state captivity, to her and to her neighbors? And supposing you weaken on this, what then? When you have taken away public education (the next unnecessary service slated for destruction) and told the mother to use her voucher at a community school she can help organize, what if she finds herself not wholly prepared for the modest task (as the bookkeepers think it) of running a school? I asked the question directly and a well-bred man of the

right replied: "If she doesn't know what her kids should be taught, maybe they should be taken away from her." The heat, the cruelty, the unfathomable bitterness of the mostly prosperous white people who love the change that is coming, have got to be seen to be believed.

And the response of the Democratic opposition? It does not yet deserve to be called an opposition—admittedly a point of some delicacy, given a Democratic president touchingly eager to lodge himself in the narrowing crack that divides the parties. The First Lady reacted to the mention of orphanages as one might to an unseemly odor: the word was so unnecessary, so uncalled for. Liberal columnists dug out their copies of *Oliver Twist* to see if they could work up a proper rage. And, as is sure to happen to any idea, no matter how degraded, "Gingrich's Orphanages" were given instant legitimacy in the media by being turned into human interest. It was just one more of those far-out, practical-impractical, humanly so interesting ideas of the new Speaker of 1994, who in trivial yet such human ways resembles the new President of 1992.

Where a word slips into speech unobserved, a host of innovations will pass into practice unchallenged. Gingrich has managed to dictate a new set of rules and conventions in the Congress (including the treatment as personal property of a school of members straight from the electoral hatchery, approaching one hundred votes); and he has done it by saying out loud that this is a revolution, and revolutions look like this. At what point did the American people say they wanted a revolution? The Democrats could turn the tables if they had the wit: "We don't want a revolution, we don't think most Americans want a revolution, and we are here to defend the large part of their lives most people don't resent and don't think needs reforming." Then again, it is hard not to fall in with the language of innovation when your vice president has spent month after month advertising something called "the information superhighway."

In the current mood, every lane is a fast lane,

and the main emotion felt by the losers is PR envy. If only *our* slogans had a little of that gloss. Think of the "Stimulus Package"—a program that could have been called Jobs for Americans, or Improving our Cities. But they called it the Stimulus Package; and it cost the Republicans nothing to kill it. I once heard a genius refer to morality as "value infusion." He must have greatly admired the Stimulus Package.

Plain words have their plainest use when you are fighting for your life. Jesse Helms, saying the president would be in danger if he came to an army base in North Carolina, was threatening with assassination the commander in chief of the armed forces. President Clinton should have said, "That is the language of treason," and asked that Helms be removed on the spot from the committee on foreign relations. And, to Helms's racist remark that it made him sick to think of American boys collecting garbage in Haiti, the reply should have come without pause that the statement betrayed a dishonorable idea of democracy.

Yet the far right who now hold sway in the country are so victory-maddened that all they have of prudence is every moment in jeopardy. They do not stand for glory or nobility, for themselves or for anyone. The whole duty of their commonwealth is: *to them who have shall be given*. During the cold war, the defense of established wealth and power went with a willingness to sacrifice wealth and life itself for the goodness of the system in which they believed. To one who remembers that posture—which one might disagree with, but never find contemptible—the speed of the change is staggering. The new motto is: no sacrifice (of any kind). The loss of an American soldier on foreign soil is not to be thought of. Congressman Goodling, of the committee on international relations, in a recent interview questioned the propriety of paying for any of our troops to serve in a UN peace-keeping mission, anywhere. His reason was that while it might be all right for us to "peacekeep" we must on no account "nation-build." Of course, the distinction is meaningless in practice: when you preserve a nation against its hostile neighbors, you are allowing

it to build itself up. Yet this withdrawal of the national government from the international order, even as the interest in national order is “devolved” upon the states, has been supported by persons with names better known than Goodling, among them Jeane Kirkpatrick.

Meanwhile, liberalism in politics has declined into policy liberalism. Chekhov said there is no greater enemy of compassion than a full stomach; and liberals of the professional class—the pollsters and legal academics and statesmen-in-waiting who travel the world recording opinions and making opinions, drafting position papers and responding to drafts of papers, writing constitutions for new nations and ruined nations—these people, if you ask whether they think the Look Like America Cabinet has been a success, have a benign come-off-it air which proves more surely than any argument that the trouble, whatever it is, does not touch them. They live at a considerable distance physically, and a longer distance socially than ever before, from the people whose benefactors they aim to be. Their compassion is still alive, but it has grown—as how should it not?—theoretical.

There was never anything admirable about populism. The popular will is a necessary counterweight to tyranny, and that is all. Nobody sane will ever look that way for wisdom. On the other hand, a party can hardly be called democratic if it lacks a popular touch, and the Democratic party’s manner is close to a perfect inversion of its beliefs. Rush Limbaugh is no cleverer than the average left-wing chatterbox, and certainly no less vulgar than the worst, but he has mastered one art wonderfully, which most Democrats shed in so distant a past they no longer know its name. He talks to the people; he does not talk about them. And he does it in large part by attacking the snobbery of their benefactors. One of the most effective articles in his last book, *See, I Told You So*, is an attack on Hillary Clinton for a mildly sanctimonious gush of late-found wisdom about the small things career and ambition are beside the love of our dear ones, a sentiment she uttered to a reporter at the time of

her father’s death. Limbaugh says in effect: Mrs. Clinton, welcome to the human race, a lot of us have known for a long time there were other things in life than ambition.

The Republicans, with this their salesman, remain what they have been ever since Reconstruction: the party of the hot new rich and the selfish old rich, the party of privilege without recriminations. The danger is lest the Democrats come to seem, as they do more and more these days, merely the party of guilty privilege. The drift showed appallingly in their warming to the North American Free Trade Agreement—a piece of Reagan-Bush legislation that should have been allowed its passage or postponement without a eulogistic gloss. Given the place of many professional Democrats in the elite of status and manners the wonder is that they do not retire from opposition entirely. Exceptions like Jim Hightower of Texas, the politician and talk-show host full of salt and sense who said George Bush was born on third base and thought he hit a triple—these level talkers of democracy are now operating almost without a party.

The liberal paralysis about how to defend and how to attack and how to talk about anything *but* policy is self-incurred. The friendly-to-all-cultures Newspeak of the eighties, which many liberals helped to shape or passively approved, is, among its many vices, a language in which invective and indeed sharp criticism of any kind is impossible. It is a language helpless to fight against the therapeutic politics that has been the latest outgrowth of a therapeutic culture. The *New York Times* probably thought it was being friendly giving a whole story to Barney Frank’s opening week of resistance to the Contract with America, but the story managed to quote a single perfunctory sound bite before settling down to the usual identity-mush about the human interest of Frank’s gayness.

The mass media have ceased to be a possible vehicle for the education of public opinion, as they were occasionally and on some subjects in the years from the Second World War to the election of Reagan. Even if they would like to do better, the anchor persons and television reporters do not know what they need to know

to do better, and the newspapers mainly follow the pattern set by their video-literate betters. Nothing anyone says in an interview can be criticized for being stupid or obscene or ill-informed, only for being politically risky or behind the curve or out of sync. The great task now is popular education, and it must be carried on in the absence of these older institutional helps. But it ought to remain, above all, education. The rotten bargain of populism is the way it tempts us to praise a

majority before we see the look on its face. The president told some mayors the other day that the unfunded mandates bill in the Senate "must have been pretty good" if so many senators voted for it. A touching and a well-timed piece of trust, but no matter how fast the scale goes down you ought to check what they put into it. And if you have the right words, you can even find a way, sometimes, of telling the people that they are wrong. □

Deborah Epstein Nord

ORPHANS AND REPUBLICANS

The Republican ascendancy has brought with it some remarkable conservative revisions of history and literature. Various politicians and scholars have encouraged us to think nostalgically about the past. Longing for a golden age before the welfare state, some of these commentators would like to take us back to Victorian Britain in search of enlightened models of social policy and personal morality.

The leading Republican champion of Victorianism is Gertrude Himmelfarb. In a recent *New York Times* Op-Ed article, Himmelfarb advanced her cause by attacking the greatest critic of Victorian mores, Charles Dickens. In Himmelfarb's view, Dickens was a befuddled bleeding heart. Too many readers, she contends, have misread his novels (particularly *Oliver Twist*) as reliable renderings of the Victorian era. Chastity, cleanliness, and shame, she insists, were the reigning values in mid-nineteenth-century Britain, not the callousness and greed that Dickens described. The Victorians nobly sought to uplift the poor, notably with the passage of the 1834 Poor Law and with the construction of homes for orphans and wayward children. In the Poor Law's

workhouses and in the orphanages, the Victorians gave the poor what they truly needed—a roof, some food, honest work, and plenty of moral guidance. Dickens simply got things wrong. The real-life *Oliver Twists* dwelled not in Dickensian hellholes but in benevolent, well-maintained, spiritually elevating institutions.

Himmelfarb confuses Victorian ideology with historical reality. Chastity? Yes, the Victorians espoused it as an ideal, but untold thousands of women were forced to make their livings as prostitutes in London streets (and untold thousands of men, high-born and low, availed themselves of their services). Cleanliness? Yes, again as an ideal (although we can be sure that even a middle-class Victorian's standard of personal cleanliness would not be recognizable as a standard today). But the lack of adequate sanitation caused contagious diseases like cholera and typhus to spread in epidemic proportions. Shame? Himmelfarb lauds the stigma associated with illegitimacy in the Victorian age, as if somehow it kept out-of-wedlock births to a minimum. But can she really want to bring back the stigmatizing



of illegitimate *children*, the inevitable victims of the cult of shame, in order to chastise their ostensibly profligate mothers?

Then there's the 1834 Poor Law. One of the law's chief aims was to discourage pauperism by requiring those who needed public support to live in workhouses. Workhouse inmates performed hard and largely useless labor and were fed meager amounts of food. (When Dickens's *Oliver* asks for "more," he is not, in fact, in an orphanage at all, as Himmelfarb misreports, but in one of those workhouses, all too accurately described.) The logic behind the law was simple: make the workhouses as harsh and demeaning as possible so that the able-bodied, "deserving" poor would work as hard as they could to stay out of them. And behind that logic lay the insidious and impractical assumption that a precise line could be drawn between the "deserving" and the "undeserving" poor—that the first group could always muster the wherewithal to lead independent lives, and that the second group (a sort of Victorian underclass) was of no use anyway. Punish the good-for-nothings, went the argument, and

the good-for-somethings would not be tempted into a lazy life at the public's expense.

As for the orphanages and children's homes, there certainly were some large private ventures (such as the famous Dr. Barnardo's) that kept their charges reasonably well fed and well clothed. But many smaller private enterprises housed children in appalling conditions. And even after some liberalizing efforts in the 1850s and 1860s, public provisioning of orphans ranged from austere to vicious.

It was the punitive attitude regarding poverty that Dickens pilloried in *Oliver Twist*. For Dickens was, above all, a critic and satirist of mentalities, not institutions. In that novel, his chief targets were those he called the "philosophers," the social thinkers and engineers who celebrated self-interest as a justification for bashing the poor. And he delivered his satire far more cagily and imaginatively than Himmelfarb recognizes. It is, for example, Fagin, the great underworld figure in the novel, who serves as Dickens's main mouthpiece for the principle that the greed of each will ultimately benefit the good of all. When Fagin preaches to his band of boy criminals about the thief's doctrine of selfishness, he sounds a great deal like the novel's Poor Law magistrates and like the political economists whom Dickens detested.

Himmelfarb, a modern-day philosopher, draws a eulogistic covering over laws and institutions that sought to starve poor people in order to discourage poverty. There are plenty of voices like hers on today's scene. What we lack are voices with the moral clarity of Charles Dickens. □

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Jeff Faux

MEXICO AND VIETNAM

In the debate over the Mexican bailout last January, U.S. stockbrokers, the Mexico lobby, and the mainstream media pressed hard for the rescue package. Their argument rested on the premise that economics had replaced military action as the basis for national security in the post-cold war era. *Washington Post* columnist Jim Hoagland wrote that the Mexican peso crisis was to Bill Clinton what the Gulf War was to George Bush and urged the administration to use financial weapons to “preserve an ally whose collapse would be politically and economically disastrous.”

There is a case to be made for an economic interpretation of the national interest in an international system increasingly dominated by global commerce. But the better military analogy to the peso crisis was Lyndon Johnson’s escalation in Vietnam, when Washington’s “best and brightest” led the nation step-by-step into disaster.

As in Vietnam, we are assured at each stage of the escalation of U.S. involvement in the Mexican economy that the new policy will solve the problem—defined as Mexico’s huge debt, which stifled economic growth and, therefore, sent large numbers of Mexicans across our borders. In the early 1980s, the United States helped the Mexican government avoid default by providing a two billion dollar loan. Later came the plan by Bush’s Secretary of Treasury Nicholas Brady, who organized Mexico’s creditors to refinance some of Mexico’s debt. Next was the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which was supposed to transform Mexico from a poor debtor nation into a rich exporter—to all the world except the United States, which we were

assured would run a trade surplus with Mexico for decades.

The passage of NAFTA in November 1993 was both a political and economic signal. Politically it meant that the U.S. government was committed to maintaining the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI, which has imposed authoritarian rule on Mexico for over sixty years. Thus, the U.S. Treasury looked the other way all through 1994 when then President Carlos Salinas spent down Mexico’s \$27 billion in hard currency reserves in order to maintain the artificially high value of the peso, which made American goods cheap. His transparent purpose was to reelect the divided and shaky PRI by sustaining the illusion that its successful advocacy of NAFTA would generate a cornucopia of U.S. goods and, implicitly, living standards like those of the U.S. It worked; the PRI won the election.

The economic signal was to the financial markets. After NAFTA, U.S. mutual funds and pensions began to roll big dollars into the Mexican stock market, and stock salesmen from Maine to Hawaii made calls to the dentists, lawyers, and other small investors hyping Mexican securities. Such massive short-term speculative investments supported Salinas’s strategy of keeping the peso high. But like all speculative bubbles, it broke, leading to a flight from the peso in December 1994. In about a week, the peso dropped against the dollar by 40 percent. With capital fleeing the peso, Ernesto Zedillo, Salinas’s successor, suddenly found himself struggling to sell short-term bonds to keep turning over the country’s debt. New York investors forced him to pay 20, then 50 percent interest rates to take the risk.

As in Vietnam, a bipartisan leadership in Washington assured Americans that our previous commitments left us no choice but escalation. Because we signed NAFTA, went the argument, we were now committed to support Mexico's economy—something they had forgotten to mention during the debate over that treaty. We were also treated to a domino theory. Pundits warned that if the market collapsed in Mexico, it would trigger crises in every other Latin American country and even spread to the rest of the third world debtor nations, and perhaps beyond. Treasury officials pointed to weakness in the stock markets of Brazil and Poland as evidence that the financial sky was falling. The business press talked ominously of a possible "global meltdown."

As in Vietnam, the academic and professional establishment was trotted out to rationalize the policy and was therefore unwilling to examine its assumptions. One did not have to be a financial whiz kid to raise a few questions. Why, if the loan was so secure, weren't private banks willing to put up the money? Why would investors flee from good investments in, say, Argentina, because the Mexican government mismanaged its economy? And why would a bailout of Mexico encourage them to invest in Argentina unless there was an implicit commitment that the United States is now prepared to bail out every other Latin American nation as well?

In fact, currency crises have been a recurring experience in Mexico. The major casualties tend to be the securities markets and the government's popularity with the business class. The U.S. was therefore handed a great deal of leverage on the Mexican oligarchy. It could have used this leverage to demand the labor rights and environmental standards that Mexican leaders had successfully resisted during the NAFTA negotiations. Had they refused again, the Clinton administration would have been justified in walking away from the table and leaving the PRI to face the consequences of its greed and incompetence. Indeed, its refusal would have reflected its own judgment that talk of economic meltdown was exaggerated.

The American experts promoting the bailout

were by and large the same people who assured us during the NAFTA debate that Mexico's economy was headed for explosive growth, that the U.S. surplus with Mexico would continuously expand after the passage of NAFTA and create hundreds of thousands of net new jobs, that illegal immigration would slow down, that NAFTA would assure political stability in Mexico, and that the ruling party in Mexico was dedicated to competence, modernization, and true democratic reform.

A little more than a year later:

- Mexico is headed for a deep recession, coming on top of a decade of austerity;
- We learned, as NAFTA opponents correctly pointed out, that the U.S. surplus with Mexico—the basis of the claims of hundreds of thousands of new jobs—was not a result of liberalization in Mexico, but of an overvalued peso. The surplus is now projected to disappear in 1995. The jobs claims, like the "body counts" of dead Vietcong, were inflated;
- Illegal immigration is now being forecast to rise and the government has already decided to spend even more money to beef up border patrols;
- Political violence and drug trafficking have escalated. The Chiapas revolt proved surprisingly hard to suppress, and the election was marked by the assassinations of the leading presidential candidate and the Speaker of the House. The drug trade was so blatant that traffickers were landing reconditioned 747s to ship drugs from Colombia to Mexico, where they were shipped overland through the speeded-up customs stations on the border.

As in Vietnam, the mistakes of elites will be paid for by the ordinary people of both countries. After ten years of austerity, real wages in Mexico will drop even lower. In our now integrated economy, this will make the jobs and incomes of large numbers of Americans who work in competing industries even more vulnerable.

And as in Vietnam, the U.S. government has heralded a succession of rulers in the client country as reformers who will bring democracy and free markets, only to watch them sink into political bickering and ineptitude. The PRI is split into several warring camps, with the followers of Zedillo and Salinas blaming each

other for the debacle. Ironically, the corrupt “old guard” is still in charge; Mexican investors with close ties to the government precipitated the run on the peso to save their own investments. These same people then came back into the markets, buying assets at deflated prices. Along with their American counterparts, they became the chief beneficiaries of the bailout of the peso.

The fundamental problem is that the Mexican political economy is dominated by an oligarchy that uses the country’s credit to borrow from foreigners and enrich itself, and then periodically demands austerity from the rest of the country on the grounds that it has to pay off the foreign debt. The bailout will perpetuate that system, virtually assuring that we will have another crisis in the future. It will send a signal to the world’s financial markets that Mexico is theirs to exploit because the U.S. government stands ready to limit losses. We have now taken on the responsibility for financial markets dominated by political cronies of a corrupt government without having any authority over it. While the largess of the U.S. Treasury extends to Mexico City, the writ of the Security and Exchange Commission, the Federal Reserve, and other financial regulators stops at the border. Already we have seen the dollar weaken against other hard currencies as it becomes clear that the United States is ready to take responsibility for the peso. This will put further upward pressure on U.S. interest rates.

Finally, as in Vietnam, the Mexican crisis reveals a Democratic administration pursuing a policy driven by a Republican view of the world—in this case the neoliberalism of multinational corporations.

For the three decades after World War II, the American economy was powered by domestic private demand, buttressed by government investments in schools and highways, the military budget, and periodic countercyclical Keynesian spending. Wages, incomes, and productivity rose year after year. Trade was a small share of our GDP. In the early 1970s, the steam began to run out of the engine; real earnings leveled off and fell. In 1994, a male

high school graduate with up to five years of work experience was making 27 percent less than the same worker made in 1979. Economists do not agree on the reasons this happened, but there is now fairly widespread agreement that they included a shift in employment from high-productivity manufacturing to low-productivity services, the decline in the strength of labor unions, the decreasing value of the minimum wage, and the combination of a rising trade deficit and a spectacular increase in imports from low wage countries.

In one sense, the history of American economic policy over the past 20 years can be seen as a desperate attempt to avoid dealing with the decline in incomes, because facing the problem would require a much greater degree of government intervention than the ruling elites are willing to accept. The Reagan answer was simply to stimulate growth with deficits generated by tax cuts for the rich and military spending. This created a great many jobs, but also drove up the value of the dollar, increased the trade deficit, and quadrupled the national debt.

Faced with the exhaustion of Reagan’s military Keynesianism, the Bush administration developed a new strategy—in effect, America would prosper by selling to other countries’ consumers. This had a number of virtues for a Republican administration and its Wall Street supporters. By locating the source of demand for U.S. products in foreign countries, they had a rationale for not reversing the earnings decline. In an American economy that was largely self-contained, high wages generated economic growth by increasing purchasing power and stimulating labor-saving investment. This was the Keynesian rationale for unions. But in a global marketplace, with American workers sometimes competing against workers making a dollar a day, business had a credible rationale for keeping wages down and undercutting unions—international competition. The vision of foreign markets also gave the Wall Street bond dealers a powerful argument for keeping real interest rates high as a way of suppressing inflationary forces that might drive U.S. costs up and make us less competitive.

Bill Clinton came to office as a garden

You Read It Here First

From "No to NAFTA," by Jeff Faux, Dissent, Summer 1993.

Other, less quantifiable, potential damages to the American economy have been ignored in the debate. For example, there is the risk of integrating Mexican financial institutions, regulated by a corrupt one-party regime, with an already fragile U.S. financial system. NAFTA makes it much easier for U.S. banks, security firms, and so on, to buy into Mexican industry. This creates the possibility that when the next debt crisis hits, the U.S. government will have to rescue the Mexican economy in order to protect major American banks. . . . NAFTA supporters gravely warn that Mexico will have an economic crisis if Salinas suffers a defeat. But Mexico is going to have a crisis with or without Salinas, and with or without NAFTA. The peso is overvalued, and real estate and financial markets are going through speculative excess. These bubbles will burst as soon as the NAFTA issue is resolved. . . . None of this means that the United States should wash its hands of Mexico's economic troubles. Nor that we can never have economic integration among the three nations of North America. But the way to approach it is similar to the way the European Community (EC) integrated Spain, Portugal, and Greece. The EC insisted that political reform come first; before these countries could come in, they had to get rid of dictatorship and to build permanent credible democratic institutions. □

variety liberal internationalist; a generalized belief in free trade came with the territory. But during a campaign in which he charged that Americans were "working harder for less," he professed to understand the pressure on American living standards from low-wage competition. He promised that any trade agreement with Mexico would be accompanied by regulations guaranteeing rising labor standards in Mexico so as to reduce the downward pressures on U.S. wages. But after the failure of his initial budget stimulus proposal and Clinton's subsequent embrace of Wall Street's deficit reduction agenda, the administration adjusted to the bond market's and George Bush's vision of a new world order. America would prosper

through trade-led growth, with little concern for the niceties of labor rights and standards. NAFTA and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) became the administration's major priorities.

Export-led growth is now the theme of the administration's economic policy. At the Commerce Department, Under-Secretary Jeffrey Garten produced a strategy paper touting the "emerging markets"—third world countries that represented immense opportunities for American investors. His boss, Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, became the chief salesman for the program, traveling around the globe to open up opportunities for trade and investment. Most of his stops are in countries with serious human and labor rights problems. But the official policy is to "de-link" these questions from trade. When Clinton's vow to use trade sanctions to pressure China to improve its human rights act clashed with the demands of U.S. investors, rights went overboard. Only when the intellectual property rights of U.S. capital were threatened by Chinese "knock-offs" of American video tapes and compact disks did the administration slap trade sanctions on China.

The history of our relationship with Mexico has revealed some of the economic and political dangers in the trade-led growth strategy. One economic problem is that, because it is driven by business concerns, the strategy inevitably generates conflicts between U.S. investment in foreign countries and export growth. NAFTA, for example, is a two thousand page document dedicated to protecting U.S. and Canadian investors in Mexico, with zero pages dedicated to protecting Mexican workers against the wage suppression policies of their government, openly aimed at undercutting U.S. wage levels in order to attract jobs to Mexico. In the GATT treaty, U.S. officials put American manufacturing at a disadvantage in order to get other nations to open up their markets to U.S. financial interests. During the debate over de-linking human rights in China, the U.S. business press repeatedly quoted the head of AT&T to the effect that a billion Chinese were potential buyers of telephone sets, without reference to

the fact that, aside from some specialty items, American companies have shipped virtually all of their telephone manufacturing to low-wage countries.

A second economic problem is that trade-led growth concentrates on low-wage nations because Western Europe and Japan are much less willing to open up their economies to imports. This means that U.S. income becomes more dependent on selling to the world's poorest, most indebted nations, who tend to be the least democratic and therefore the least stable.

The third problem is that a trade-led growth strategy ultimately commits the United States to keep these markets stable with bailouts and subsidies. This leads to the bizarre economic policy in which the United States subsidizes the consumption of the upper and upper-middle classes of less developed countries—in the hope that perhaps 10 percent of their income will be spent on imports from the U.S.—while at the same time it is slashing aid to poor and lower-middle-class people at home who spend 90 percent of their marginal income on goods produced here.

Since this group is the core of the Democratic constituency, this has obvious political implications for Clinton and the Democrats. It raises the question of why we should bail out the mismanaged Mexican government when we refuse to bail out New York City or the District of Columbia—or, for that matter, Orange County, California, whose local government recently bet wrong on the derivatives market.

Even the multinationalist crowd has noticed the perverse politics of the administration's policy. Jim Hoagland, who likened the peso bailout to the Gulf War, later acknowledged:

From imposing trade sanctions on China to helping Mexico out of its financial jam, from fighting the budget deficit in his early presidential days of economic recovery to presenting his new, mildly reflationary budget, the president has steered a steady course of placating American business interests and seeking the financial markets' authenticating approval.

Finally, and for the Democrats, more ominously, the Clinton administration's multi-

nationalist strategy has allowed the Republicans to walk both sides of the political street. Responding to their Wall Street and big business constituency, most Republicans support the president's strategy. But the Republican right—Pat Buchanan, Jack Kemp, Rush Limbaugh, and the talk radio reactionaries—had a field day blasting Clinton for a giveaway to Mexico.

A few progressive voices—Ralph Nader, Jesse Jackson, a few labor leaders, populist congressional Democrats like Marcy Kaptur—opposed the deal. But the Democratic congressional leadership muted criticism so as not to further damage a battered presidency. The effect was to allow Republicans to surround the president; they were able to deliver for their multinational constituency and also to be the most prominent opposition and thus on the side of the 81 percent of Americans who, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, opposed the bailout. Ironically, they were also on the side of Mexican voters, who, according to a poll by one Mexico City paper, *La Reforma*, opposed the bailout by 74 percent.

The administration's answer to anxious Americans is, not to worry. They can win the trade wars by becoming better educated and trained workers. To motivate them, it has proposed a modest tax break for college expenses. Aside from the likelihood that for the most part the subsidy will go to those already attending college, the fact is that the college educated already represent a much higher share of the labor force in the United States than among its major competitors—and still real earnings of employed college graduates have been dropping since 1987.

Moreover, the unintended message from the administration to its own working-class constituency is that the reason your job is in jeopardy is that you do not have the skills to compete. In other words, *you* are the problem. No one in this administration seems to have thought out the impact of lecturing Americans that they will have to spend their lives on a treadmill of reskilling in a world in which they are constantly threatened with obsolescence.

This may be an exhilarating prospect for the nimble symbolic analysts who run Washington, but it is frightening for most people.

Having made its own working-class constituency fearful of the future, the administration then turned its back on them. For the typical middle-class American worker with family responsibilities, there is little in the way of public assistance for the lifetime of learning the administration says is needed. Democrats abandoned Clinton's original proposal for universal on-the-job training and gave low priority even to the modest Reemployment Act, which died in the last Congress. An adequate level of investment in skills would be expensive, and the truth is that the administration just does not want to fight for more money. When asked about this recently, one administration official—with reasonably liberal credentials—shrugged his shoulders and said that working people facing job stress will just have to invest in themselves. "There is no free lunch," he added, for those not familiar with the writings of Milton Freidman.

The result is that, instead of addressing the anxiety of the middle class that Secretary of Labor Reich has eloquently described, White House Democrats seem hell-bent on aggravating it. Labor union activists—the people the Democrats rely on for phone banks, soft money, and precinct work—have soured on Bill Clinton. And, as in the debate over Vietnam, the Republicans are poised to take advantage of both sides of the issue. They have the support of the multinational corporations who support Clinton's trade-led growth and can profit from the disaffection of Democrats who don't.

Still, some argue that the administration is making a shrewd calculation to trade off its working-class support for the money and clout of multinational business. The 1994 election was one test of that thesis. Another was a recent poll by *Business Week* of the political preferences of the CEOs of the nation's largest corporations. They opposed Clinton's reelection by 87 to 9.

It is hard to see any light for Bill Clinton at the end of this tunnel. □

Leo P. Ribuffo

RELIGION, POLITICS, AND THE LATEST CHRISTIAN RIGHT

According to standard criteria, the United States is one of the most religious countries in the industrialized world—perhaps the most religious country. More than 40 percent of Americans claim to attend religious services each week, compared to 14 percent of the British and 12 percent of the French. These claims may reflect good intentions rather than actual behavior, but—as Franklin Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower, and Ronald Reagan

showed—personal piety can flourish in the absence of regular church attendance. Indeed, 90 percent of Americans pray, 80 percent expect to face God's judgment, and 60 percent (including Hillary Rodham Clinton) anticipate Jesus' return. At least eight million Americans accept a system of Biblical interpretation called premillennial dispensationalism—not only to predict the time of Jesus' return, but also to discover the divine meaning behind wars,

economic changes, and technological innovations. In other words, probably more Americans *use* Bible prophecy than can *identify* Keynesian economics.

Cultural conflict in the United States has always carried a strong religious tinge. During the twenties, most Protestants supported Prohibition, and the fundamentalists among them campaigned also to bar Darwinism from public school curricula. During the Great Depression, a minority of fundamentalists formed the core constituency of an anti-Semitic, old Christian right that denounced the New Deal as a wing of the international Jewish conspiracy. A self-consciously new Christian right organized in reaction to the cultural liberalization of the sixties and became a junior partner in the Reagan coalition. Grass-roots efforts continued even after the movement dropped beneath cosmopolitan notice in the late 1980s. The election of Bill Clinton, a self-consciously hip cultural liberal, brought fresh recruits and renewed notoriety. Roughly 9 percent of Americans now identify with the Christian right.

None of this is esoteric information. Even the intricacies of premillennial dispensationalism are accessible to anyone with a cable television hookup. Scholarly study of religion is booming, and painless popularizations for the secular are available in paperback (notably Garry Wills's *Under God* and Paul Boyers's *When Time Shall Be No More*).

Unfortunately, leaders of the cultural and political left prefer to respond with reflexive anticlericalism and willful ignorance. A dozen years ago, during the first phase of the latest Christian right, stunned secularists grossly exaggerated the influence of television preachers; assumed that fundamentalists, evangelicals, and Pentecostals obeyed their clergy like so many robots; and inferred from President Reagan's ruminations on Bible prophecy that he might start a nuclear war in order to advance the date of Armageddon. Although the left has ostentatiously reconsidered many subjects in the last few years, religion has not been one of them. Post-election mailings from the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) and People for the American Way exude the usual overkill,

and the *Nation's* periodic articles on conservative religious communities read like reports from a rocket probe to Saturn.

So the first thing the left needs to do is to appreciate that religious issues in the public sphere are no less complicated than economic, racial, or ethnic issues, and then to learn something about them. Initial forays into this unfamiliar territory may be discouraging. Cultural issues with a religious tinge show no sign of disappearing through the alchemy of secularization. Much as Americans fought over temperance and Prohibition for a hundred years, they may battle over abortion well into the next century. And contrary to another venerable dream, cultural concerns are not easily trumped in the voting booth by economic concerns. Evangelicals and fundamentalists have been solidly ensconced in the Republican coalition since the 1984 election and show no sign of being dislodged anytime soon.

But the news isn't all bad. The latest militant Christian right represents a minority among culturally conservative Protestants, many of whom are appalled or embarrassed by Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and their fellows. Alliances between Protestant and Catholic militants, still separated by class and ethnicity, remain fragile. Perhaps most important, the wider community of culturally conservative Protestants is neither monolithic nor static. Most evangelicals and fundamentalists continue to anticipate the rise of the Antichrist but, unlike their counterparts in the thirties, rarely expect this agent of Satan to ally with the pope or an international Jewish conspiracy. Young evangelicals are less likely than their parents' generation to condemn premarital sex and homosexuality. Over the long term, culturally conservative Protestants may move in a more tolerant and cosmopolitan direction, much as Catholics (a group analogously stereotyped by the left) have done since the fifties.

A deeper understanding of religious issues and constituencies could yield shrewder strategic responses. Probably most readers of *Dissent* reflexively disagree with my view that local option for a moment of silence in public

schools is a tolerable social compromise rather than a serious threat to freedom. But they should think about it. No religious issue appeals to more Americans or does more to convince pro forma Christians that secularists are out to undermine their basic beliefs. Furthermore, the energy invested in this largely symbolic issue could be better spent deflecting conservative assaults on school curricula and library acquisitions, defending gay rights, opposing reimposition of the “gag rule,” and providing protection for abortion clinics. If school prayer must remain a priority, then the left at least should play down two arguments self-evident only to itself: that a moment of silence violates the First Amendment (dubious, since the violation wasn’t discovered for 170 years) and that it stigmatizes children who don’t participate (also a reason to abolish football teams, cheerleaders, proms, and—as the Christian right emphasizes—sex education). A smarter and more effective argument,

dating back to the dissident Puritan Roger Williams, is that forced conflation of church and state corrupts the former more than the latter.

More important, the left should try to cool the rhetoric about religion-related issues that spans the political spectrum. While frightened secularists warn against incipient theocracy, Pat Buchanan proclaims a “cultural war” and the normally astute sociologist James Davidson Hunter sees one in the making. In fact, we are in the midst of what is only the latest phase in a perennial shouting match to define a normative American way of life. The latest round is less volatile than those in the twenties, thirties, or sixties and, with some mutual consideration and good luck, may stay that way. Our metaphors can make a difference. Shouting matches are annoying and sometimes end in violence, but they are more likely than wars to settle into tolerable truces. □

MARK LEVINSON

THE REPUBLICAN ECONOMIC AGENDA

Republican ideologues are fighting a new cold war. Their enemy is the “corrosive liberal ethos” and the government that it supports. They believe that Ronald Reagan and George Bush failed, because government, or some semblance of it, still exists. This is unacceptable because government, as conservative writer David Frum puts it, “makes the social problems that conservatives fret about so intractable.” Behind their fervor is a belief that this may be their last chance to do away with the welfare state.

How severely did Reagan damage the welfare state? How does the new Republican

agenda contained in the “Contract With America” go beyond Reagan?

The American welfare state developed in two phases. The first, the New Deal, was characterized by social insurance programs, principally Social Security and unemployment insurance, and by great structural reforms, such as the Wagner Act, the Wage-Hour Act, and the Tennessee Valley Authority, whose object was not to redistribute income but to redistribute power in the economy.

The second phase was the Great Society of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Great Society was an attempt to eliminate urban poverty through increased public assistance. In

contrast to the social insurance programs of the New Deal, most Great Society programs were funded by the federal government but administered by agencies of state and local governments. They were also means-tested, meaning that recipients had to have incomes below a certain level.

Distinct in origin and rationale, these two sources of the increase in government spending—social insurance associated with the New Deal and federal aid associated with the Great Society—met different fates at the hands of the Reagan budget cutters in 1981. Only the most gingerly attempts were made to reduce Social Security spending, and these were immediately thrown back by bipartisan opposition in Congress. The brunt of the conservative attack was borne by programs deriving from the Great Society initiatives.

The damage that Reagan did was real enough. Reagan reduced aid to states and cities while burdening them with responsibility for many programs—particularly housing, education, mass transportation, infrastructure, and aid to the poor. According to the U.S. Conference of Mayors, federal spending for urban programs fell by 72 percent between 1979 and 1989. We are paying for this now in suffering and social turmoil in our cities.

The new Republican Congress is considering changes that go well beyond anything accomplished by Reagan. If the Republicans succeed in fulfilling their Contract With America it will lead to the dismantling of much of the federal government and the redistribution of income from low- and middle-income households to upper-income Americans.

The centerpiece of the Republican agenda is a constitutional amendment to balance the federal budget by fiscal year 2002. Republicans plan to do this while cutting taxes and protecting the military and Social Security from budget reductions.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, to balance the budget by 2002 and pay for the tax cuts contained in the Contract With America would require more than \$1.4 trillion in non-defense, non-Social Security program cuts. All other federal expenditures would have to be cut by 30 percent compared with

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spending projected under current law for fiscal year 2002. (All figures, unless otherwise specified, come from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.)

That means a 30 percent cut in Medicare, a 30 percent reduction in payments to veterans' widows and widowers, the firing of one in three federal workers, and so on. Of course these cuts are not spelled out in the Contract. Virtually all of the budget savings proposed in the Contract consist of reductions in basic food, cash, housing, medical insurance, child care, and other benefits for the poor.

The budget cuts are needed not only to balance the budget but also to finance an array of generous tax cuts primarily benefiting upper-income Americans and large corporations. According to the Treasury Department, the Contract's tax provisions would cost the federal government \$205 billion in the first five years, rising to \$520 billion in the second five-year period after enactment. About half of the benefits from the tax cuts will go to the top 10 percent of families, those with income over

\$100,000 a year. Nearly 30 percent of the benefits will go to the top 2 percent of families, those with incomes exceeding \$200,000.

The cuts in low-income programs are unprecedented in their severity, almost three times as large as the cuts in such programs that were enacted in 1981 and 1982 under Reagan. In addition, the Contract calls for making most legal immigrants ineligible for sixty different health, education, job training, nutrition, housing cash assistance, and social service programs.

Despite the depth of these reductions, the budget cannot be balanced simply by cutting programs for poor people. The Contract's cuts in poverty programs would constitute less than 10 percent of the total spending cuts needed to balance the budget by fiscal year 2002 without touching Social Security or defense and while cutting taxes.

Which leads to the question: what about Social Security? Newt Gingrich has said that Social Security is off-limits for now, but that Congress should look at it in five to seven years. It seems inescapable that a balanced budget requirement after 2002, reduced taxes, and increased defense spending would lead to enormous pressure to reduce Social Security.

With the usual fanfare about states' rights and decentralization, the Contract calls for folding many formerly separate programs into block grants to be given to states. The block grants come with no strings attached and with lower funding levels than the programs had before consolidation. For example, all federal food assistance programs—ten programs in all, including food stamps, WIC, and the school lunch program—would be consolidated into one block grant. Food assistance would be reduced by about \$18 billion over four years. The Contract also proposes to cap other low-income programs—including Supplemental Security Income benefits for the elderly and disabled poor, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), low-income housing, the child support enforcement program, child care support for working poor families not on

welfare, and the employment and training program for AFDC recipients.

Since the Contract was written there have been proposals to turn AFDC into a block grant to states. The proposal would freeze the amount of money the federal government gives to states at 103 percent of the amount they received in 1994. The funds available would no longer be adjusted automatically to reflect changes in the number of households in need. If the next five years are like the last five, the states would lose at least \$20 billion.

Block grants are biased against the programs involved. States and cities already compete in offering tax breaks to lure corporate investment and jobs. Devolving more federal programs to states would simply encourage states to be more ruthless in bidding for business. What state would dare to keep taxes high enough to finance food stamps, at the cost of losing business to its neighbor? It is precisely to avoid this debasing spectacle that social service benefit levels and the taxes that support them should remain the responsibility of the federal government.

The loss of entitlements would be particularly serious during recessions, when the number of poor families needing food stamps and the number of poor children needing free school lunches increase. From June 1990 to June 1992, when the civilian unemployment rate rose from 5.1 to 7.7 percent, food stamp participation climbed by more than five million people. The average number of low-income children receiving free school lunches rose by more than one million during this period.

The Republican reforms would wreak havoc with the economy. Currently, when the economy slows down, tax revenues decline and government spending increases on such programs as unemployment compensation, food stamps, and welfare. Such temporary increases in the deficit act as automatic stabilizers, offsetting some of the reduction in the purchasing power of the private sector and cushioning the economy's slide. When the economy recovers, the automatic stabilizers work in the other direction: tax revenues rise, spending for unemployment benefits and other

safety net programs falls, and the deficit narrows. The sheer size of the federal government prevents recessions from turning into depressions. In 1929 federal spending was less than 3 percent of gross national product. Today federal spending is almost one-fourth of GNP.

A balanced budget amendment would throw the automatic stabilizers into reverse. Congress would be required to raise taxes or cut spending programs in a recession to counteract increases in the deficit. Rather than

moderating the normal ups and downs of the business cycle, government policy would make them worse.

With luck—some stiff opposition from the Democrats also wouldn't hurt—many of these proposals may never become law. If there is anything to the claim of economists about the importance of self-interest, it is bad news for the Republicans. There are precious few people who will benefit from the Contract With America. □

Jo-Ann Mort

LABOR'S TROUBLES

When they passed legislation mandating their own compliance with federal labor laws in the first hundred days of the congressional term, Republican leaders already knew that in the next hundred they would begin the systematic dismantling of federal labor law. It's surprising that neither the media nor Democratic party officials called them on this. They need only have glanced at the record of officials who preside over the committees that oversee labor law, who range in their union-friendly voting record from a mere 7 percent for Representative Harris Fawell of Illinois (whose subcommittee has jurisdiction over health and pension issues) to a whopping 27 percent for Representative William Goodling of Pennsylvania, chair of the Economic and Educational Opportunities Committee.

The Republicans moved swiftly to implement their agenda, which includes repeal of Davis-Bacon—legislation that for six decades has guaranteed that building-trades wages on federal or federally assisted construction projects cannot fall below the prevailing union rate in an area—an end to federally mandated safety and health regulations and monies for health and safety inspection, elimination of the forty-hour work week to

allow for overtime work without compensation, repeal of the minimum wage, and the repeal of a section of the Wagner-era labor regulations called Section 8(a)2, which forbids companies from setting up union-like mechanisms in the workplace that are company dominated and financed. This last item was introduced in a bill called the TEAM Act at a kickoff rally in Washington sponsored by the Labor Policy Association (founded in 1939 by CEOs whose aim was the dismemberment of the National Labor Relations Act), the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the National Association of Manufacturers.

Just as the Republicans were introducing their legislative agenda this past January, a presidential commission under the auspices of Commerce Secretary Ron Brown and Labor Secretary Robert Reich reported its own recommendations on changes in federal labor laws. Chaired by former labor secretary and Harvard economist John Dunlop, and made up of academics, former government officials, one CEO (Paul Allaire, whose workforce at Xerox is unionized) and one former labor leader (Doug Fraser of the UAW), the commission was mandated to examine new methods of

workplace reorganization to encourage productivity and cooperation and to recommend possible changes in labor laws and regulatory mechanisms.

Much of labor agreed to the commission when it was conceived in 1992. They were hoping that the commission would offer a pro-labor, forward looking legislative blueprint for what was then a Democratic Congress and White House.

When Clinton took office, labor thought it could legislate its way back to a position of relative strength. There was no thought given to the Democrats losing control of Congress, nor was there an acknowledgment of the erosion of support for labor among Democrats. Yet except for a National Labor Relations Board that is one of the fairest in decades (no small item), organized labor wasn't doing well legislatively even before the Republican takeover. One of labor's top priorities—legislation to outlaw replacement workers in strikes—lost in the Senate because of Democratic defections. While labor was unequivocally safer with Democrats in charge of Congress, there simply is no longer agreement among Democrats to support labor's agenda. Nor is there unambiguous support among intellectuals or pundits long considered pro-union. Leading academics serving on the Dunlop Commission such as Paul Weiler and Richard Freeman (both of Harvard) exemplify a new breed of otherwise liberal-minded scholars who dismiss the ability of the union movement to force a

change in the economic or political climate of the country. That appears to be the motivation behind the commission-generated support for a repeal of 8(a)2.

The fight over 8(a)2 is part of a debate over labor-management cooperation and proposals for experiments in new forms of work organization where workers and management sit down together to either discuss or implement changes in the workplace. These arrangements have been popping up in various settings. Several unions have been in the forefront of these efforts to work jointly with management to raise standards and productivity. The Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers, the Communications Workers of America, the Steelworkers, and the United Auto Workers are among the unions that have embarked on these ventures. Last year, the AFL-CIO's Committee on the Evolution of Work took a position supporting labor-management cooperation when a union is a partner. The truth is that unions have been more willing to take part in these initiatives than have American corporations. But it's impossible to imagine a scenario where truly productive workplace innovation can occur unless workers have the legal right to negotiate the basic workplace issues normally dealt with in collective bargaining. Only unions can block employer domination of work "teams."

Weiler, Freeman, and others have been flirting with German-style models of works councils and Japanese models of labor-management cooperation in order to provide a "voice" for American workers in an era of dangerously low unionization. But voice, in a business-dominated climate, offers workers virtually no power. Nothing short of a stronger union movement can stem the onslaught, complete with Wild West ethics, to which American workers have been subjected by capital and management. If U.S. workers had the muscle of blue-collar workers in Germany combined with the substantial labor and social standards mandated by the German government and the European Union, these added mechanisms could easily strengthen union activities, as works councils do in Germany.

Welcome Aboard

We are happy to welcome to our editorial board George Packer and Ann Snitow, both of whom have written for *Dissent* for several years. George is the author of *The Village of Waiting*, a memoir about Africa, and *The Half Man*, a novel set in Southeast Asia. Ann teaches literature and women's studies at the New School for Social Research. She is very active with the Coalition of East-West Women and is currently co-editing a collection of essays about the early days of contemporary U.S. feminism.

Yet while Weiler, Freeman and others use Germany and Japan as their models, the Republican congressional leadership looks to Singapore for ideas. Their goal is to “free up” corporate resources by a total repeal of federal regulatory mandates. Under the guise of the TEAM Act, the Republicans want to dispose of the 8(a)2 section of the Wagner Act to allow more authority for the corporation and less democracy for the workers.

The notion that workers can gain an authentic voice in the workplace through the kindness of enlightened management in today’s U.S. business climate was put to the test in the battle between the Japanese owners of Bridgestone/Firestone and four thousand unionized workers who have been on strike since last July in Decatur, Illinois. The owners had declared the workers “associates,” as in Japan. But when the “associates” struck during contract talks in July 1994, management moved to permanently replace all of them—something that is illegal in Japan, but condoned, even applauded, by U.S. employers. Bridgestone/Firestone is not the only company in which Japanese owners use this country as if it were the third world, taking advantage of a less unionized, less regulated environment.

Also typical of the U.S. workplace is the case of Fieldcrest Cannon Mills towel manufacturers in North Carolina. Since 1974, seven thousand workers, who form the largest industrial unit of nonunion workers in North America, have tried to unionize three times under the banner of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union. The union lost the latest election in 1991 by only two hundred votes. When the 1991 union campaign began, the company had just initiated wage cuts, work force reductions and a 30 percent reduction in workers’ pensions. The workers were ripe for unionization. Yet, as the campaign progressed, the company isolated hundreds of pro-union workers from the rest of the workforce. Supervisors conducted intensive one-on-one meetings with undecided voters and threatened firings. Tens of thousands of dollars were spent on anti-union propaganda inside and outside the plant. Two years after the ballot, a judge ruled against the company for massive viola-

tions of labor law, but the company’s appeal is still pending. The process could drag on interminably.

This scenario is repeated at workplaces throughout the country, among blue and white collar workers. HarperCollins in San Francisco, the publishing conglomerate owned by Rupert Murdoch, recently quashed a campaign for union representation. Workers were tired of low pay and no pay for overtime. There was an employee council in place to deal with employees’ concerns, the type of council advocated by those who want to repeal 8(a)2. But the publishing employees, frustrated by their lack of power and the inability to take legal recourse, approached the Communications Workers of America to help them organize. Soon after the campaign began, a company executive sent a letter to each employee at home saying that “the current feisty, free and open involvement of the entire staff . . . would be most endangered by the success of the CWA petition.” A second letter signed by all company managers stated that “unionization . . . would not serve to promote cooperation and solidarity.”

After management’s legal maneuvers delayed the union election for six months, and after the CEO declared “war”—he pounded his fist on a table before his employees *and* threatened to uproot the publisher’s San Francisco base—the election was held. The union lost by five votes. Four of them are being challenged.

Situations like these will proliferate as Congress dismantles the Wagner Act and all federal protection for workers. Labor is in a reactive position against a Republican Congress and a severely weakened Clinton administration. But all is not lost. Emancipation from the illusion that Democratic control of Washington would deliver for the unions may free up the labor movement. Corporate America’s bold initiatives offer the labor movement an opportunity to fight back with creativity and vigor. That means testing tactics that appeal to union activists in communities far from the Beltway. One approach is civil disobedience to protest the lack of workers’ democratic rights in the workplace. This was tried by about a dozen unions just a year or so ago. By comparing the struggle for workplace democracy with that of

the early civil rights movement, unions can also reach out to nonunion workers, to the religious community, and to an entire generation of young workers who know nothing about what unions do, let alone what unions won for previous generations of workers.

The irony is that even under dire circum-

stances, union organizing is experiencing a rebirth. As corporations test their power under the Republicans, it's likely that more workers will need union representation. Unions can recapture the nation's imagination by dramatically—and relentlessly—exposing the reality of America's workplaces. □

Charles Knight

HARD QUESTIONS FOR THE LEFT

Four weeks after the 1994 elections former liberal, former senator, and former presidential hopeful Paul Tsongas proclaimed the need for a third party and invited Colin Powell to be its standard bearer. The *Boston Globe* then ran a cartoon with the tag line, "That's all we need, a third Republican Party." For a progressive reader that cartoon was likely to elicit a nod of agreement and a short chuckle, but it also carried a dismal reminder that the American left has no meaningful voice or power in national politics.

It is tempting to hope that a rejuvenated American left will rise from the ashes of the final collapse of the centrist Democratic congressional coalition. But the mythical Phoenix will not be the vehicle for the left's recovery; it will have to be much more of a bootstrap affair, likely to take decades.

The near-term prospects of the American left are so poor because it suffers from the same basic deficiencies as the old ruling center. It has no credible program for delivering what the broad public most wants from its government—a rising standard of living and the security that it won't disappear overnight. What the left has offered is a lot of criticism of the economic system, but people don't vote for you because you use fancy constructs to tell them what they already know—that the boss

has the power and that somebody else has what you need. The votes will come when the left demonstrates it can change the formulas of power and justice and deliver prosperity.

One way to understand the growing power of conservative ideology is that for most Americans it appears far more likely that they will improve their position through individual effort, initiative, and luck than through collective action—either through associations such as unions or through government. A recent public opinion study commissioned by the AFL-CIO found that "the top reason people give for the decline in unionization is that 'economic changes have made it hard for unions to protect their members' wages and jobs.'" The fact that conservatives are having an easy time undermining collective institutions is testament mainly to the new, weakened conditions of those institutions.

The expansion of international capital flows and the growing strength of multinational corporations have largely disarmed national governments of their tools of macro-economic management. The transformation of the economy from a predominance of factory-based industrial production to the predominance of "service" production has weakened unions and attached a drag on productivity and wage rate growth. The combination of unanticipated

slower growth and the demographic bulge of the aging baby boom have undermined public confidence in the Social Security system's ability to meet future obligations without truly onerous taxation of wage earners. If the left is to achieve a meaningful presence in the nation's politics it must offer credible responses to these conditions.

New Deal market-moderating reforms, it has been said, were palatable in the United States because they would "save capitalism from itself." This may have been true once when the Great Depression undercut the self-confidence of the propertied classes and communism threatened from across the seas. Now a confident and arrogant propertied class believes it defeated communism—the world is now its oyster; so why bother buying off the poor and wage-laboring classes with reform? And besides, experience shows it costs much more than even the most generous New Deal programs to ameliorate the ravages of the market. It is far more attractive to cultivate and listen to the Murrys and Feldsteins who recite endlessly the virtues of laissez-faire and thus absolve those on top of any guilt that might slip in.

In this new economic and ideological reality progressives have had little to offer a majority of citizens. We have not yet articulated an effective regime of regulating international capital or provided a credible answer to the productivity/wage conundrum in services. Nor have progressives faced the growing burden of Social Security taxes on the younger generation of workers. Finally, we do not have an ideology of future collective prosperity—if anything, we have an ideology of economic and ecological doom. To have a chance at achieving broad popularity and democratic political power the left must have a credible vision of a good life (from its material to its spiritual dimension) for all in a healthy and robust environment. Until progressives have a program that can effectively address these issues and frame it in an inspiring positive vision of the future, we should not expect to regain lost ground, especially on the terrain of national politics.

In the Winter 1995 issue of *Dissent*, Claus Offe proposes a partial solution to the current failure of national macro-economic management toward the social goal of full employment. From a position of extreme pessimism about social control of economies, Offe jumps to a position of unwarranted optimism about the potential for a collective decision to provide a guaranteed base income to all citizens.

The political momentum of guaranteed income proposals peaked in the United States in the period of 1968–1973 at a time when economic optimism, growth rates, and employment opportunities had been high for a generation. After the economy faltered in 1973–1974, guaranteed income has never returned to the serious policy agenda. From the American experience it is hard to make the case that the public in Germany or anywhere else will support guaranteed income proposals when economic insecurity is rampant.

More important than the issue of the current political appeal of guaranteed income policies is a troubling question of their potential contribution to the hardening of the new class stratification. Already in the United States we have the spread of an ideology of personal productivity. According to it, the world divides into those who are productive and those who are not. In its most virulent form techno/managerial and professional elites believe it is they alone who are the wealth creators, thus they deserve hugely disproportionate shares of any wealth created. The mass of employed workers in industry or services is deemed not "creative" and thus not productive of competitive advantage, which is the preeminent condition of wealth creation in the global economy.

This is, of course, only a new gloss on an old ideology. But let us assume for a moment that today's ruling classes were persuaded (responding to a plausible line of argument) that some sort of subsistence guaranteed income would facilitate a degree of social order that would actually enhance the capacity of the productive classes to create and manage their wealth (or, at least, reduce their anxiety about crime). How neatly a guaranteed subsistence income would fit with the ideology of produc-

tivity! Those who “freely” chose to receive the social income would also be selecting membership in a class with no moral claim to the wealth of the society beyond what the “productive” class chose to give them. According to what political and social dynamic would this social income-dependent class ever gain more than the meanest subsistence?

This condition may seem little different than that of those now “on the dole,” but there is one important difference. Current welfare programs (those for the “able-bodied”) are meant to be temporary support until the person can find a job and regain economic independence. However unrealistic, this allows the welfare recipient a fragile tie to dignity, because dependence is to be a temporary measure enabling an eventual return to the status of “contributing member of society.” It is a tragedy that a “permanent welfare class” with low civic esteem has developed because of the failure of the economy to reach full employment. Nevertheless, to exchange the

“temporary assistance” of the current programs for a permanent subsistence-income entitlement would play right into the social/economic ideology of the upper classes and serve to increase the rigidities of class stratification.

We must construct better solutions to the problem of unemployment. We need new tools to manage the economy. We must rein in the bond traders who have gained far too much power to set the public agenda and who are fond of claiming that 6 percent unemployment is “non-inflationary full employment.” We must discourage low-wage-seeking disinvestment from America. We must regain the government’s capacity to use fiscal policy to moderate the business cycle. And, as the productivity and wealth of the country increase, we must achieve a norm of fewer work hours a year in order to share effectively the declining aggregate societal labor requirement. These are some of the core requisites of progress toward a democratic society with citizens of more equitable status and means. □

Jeffrey C. Isaac

GOING LOCAL

It was widely expected that the Republicans would make significant gains in 1994. The Democrats were in disarray, suffering from powerful anticongressional sentiment and from too close an identification with their president, Bill Clinton, a man plagued by bad political judgment and even worse press coverage. But few expected the landslide that occurred.

The result: the Republicans control both houses of Congress for the first time in almost fifty years; they have captured a number of high-profile governorships and state legislatures; and the public policy agenda has been moved drastically toward the right. More

ominously, the electorate has been mobilized by organized and interconnected conservative groups, including the Christian Coalition, the National Rifle Association, and the increasingly right-wing Republican National Committee. The success of these groups seems to prove that concerted civic action can make a difference in politics. Unfortunately, it is the right that has demonstrated this.

And yet it is hard to have sympathy for the Democrats or for Clinton. The Democrats have abjured any serious commitment to reforms, and Clinton has squandered whatever credibility—and support—he could claim among the

forces of the democratic left. If commentators agree on one thing, it is that the election signaled a profound dissatisfaction with the political system as a whole. Public opinion polls reveal a widespread and deep distrust of politicians and of the legislative process in general, a cynicism that helps to explain the continuing appeal of Ross Perot. Kevin Phillips's recent book, *Arrogant Capital*, gives voice to this sentiment. The Republican "Contract With America," drafted by that avatar of Jeffersonianism, Newt Gingrich, also articulates this sentiment. Americans, it seems, like neither incumbent politicians nor governmental institutions. What passes for the democratic process is seen as removed from the citizenry, responsive to entrenched and corrupt forces beyond popular control. In this sense the electoral victory of the Republican party is only the tip of the political iceberg.

The typical Democratic response—to treat the dramatic defeat as a tactical failure—is simply oblivious to what is going on. The party, it is said, did not campaign effectively enough: it failed to bring out African-American voters, who might have tipped the scales in key races such as the gubernatorial contest in New York, or to mobilize traditional supporters such as blue-collar workers; it did not exploit the economic "prosperity" that Clinton's policies have helped to sustain; it has not learned to "master the media" in the way that the Republicans under Reagan had done. All these excuses are true, but they are *excuses*, not explanations, and to that extent they are beside the point.

African-Americans did not turn out because the Democratic party has done little or nothing to respond to their interests. The traditional trade union support for Democrats had little effect because the union movement is in dramatic decline, a long-term political process that Democratic centrism has abetted. "Prosperity" failed to swing the election because "prosperity" rings hollow in an economy increasingly dominated by nonunion, low-wage, white-collar, and service-sector employment. The Democrats, whose NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement)-centered economic policy is little different from Bush

Republicanism, have done little to address this discontent. More deeply, people are simply fed up with politics as usual. Even if there were a chicken in every pot—and there is not!—it is not clear that this would compensate for the pervasive sense that things are not right. This helps to explain why constituents seemed so willing to turn out of office even such powerful, successful pork barrelers as Tom Foley of Washington and Jack Brooks of Texas. The Democrats seem congenitally unable to project a moral vision or indeed even to use moral language. This is one reason why they are in such bad shape.

On the other hand, Republican triumphalism is illusory. As many have observed, popular disaffection with the Democrats does not necessarily translate into strong Republican electoral support. This time the Republicans benefited from low turnout of traditional Democratic voters, and from a tidal wave of animosity toward incumbents; but next time they may be the victims of the same negativism. Post-election gloating to the contrary, the Republicans are a deeply divided party. Rudolph Giuliani's defection to the Cuomo camp is simply one symptom of a broader division between centrist Republicans, many based in major urban areas, and right-wing conservatives like Gingrich and Jesse Helms, who, while appealing to anticongressional sentiment, have managed to parlay their congressional seniority into a national power base. The so-called "battle for the soul" of the Republicans waged in Virginia over the Oliver North candidacy symbolizes this division, which will deepen once the Republicans are placed in the position of having to govern and can no longer rail against a Democratic Congress. When one considers the problems confronting the nation, and the depth of public cynicism about the political process, it is not hard to foresee trouble ahead for the Republicans. American politics seems poised for a period of prolonged stasis.

How should the democratic left respond to this situation?

A cynic might suggest that the answer to this question doesn't much matter, given the obvious weakness of even traditional liberalism

in the United States at this time. But for those of us not yet ready to bow before the idol of political success, the question is how might a more genuinely democratic politics be strengthened? Advocates of a "New Party" make a convincing case that the Democrats have become hopelessly entrenched and corrupt. But the idea of an alternative mass political party of the left seems equally hopeless, not only because of the inhospitability of the American electoral system to third parties, but also because there is no significant constituency for such an alternative.

Yet the project of constituting a "left wing of the possible" within the Democratic party, pursued with enormous energy by Michael Harrington and still the official position of Democratic Socialists of America, seems equally naive. For the Democrats have abandoned even the trappings of social democracy, American-style. This is perfectly explicable, because the constituencies on which this left liberalism relied have been decimated by the decline of the labor movement, the impasse of the civil rights movement, and the fragmentation of the "left" by the politics of racial, gender, sexual, and ethnic identity.

What, then, is to be done?

Discussion about how a democratic left could be reconstituted tends to focus on three areas. One is consideration of alternative public policies in such diverse areas as foreign and military policy, corporate regulation, and even market socialism. A second concerns new strategies for the labor movement, linkages between ecology and sustainable economic growth, and public policies—like labor-law reform and new kinds of social provision—that might empower constituencies of the democratic left rather than simply create new bureaucratic structures. The third is the elaboration of a moral vision of democratic pluralism that is relevant to the crisis of the welfare state and the reemergence of "civil society," the rise of "multiculturalism" and the intensification of identity politics, and the serious crisis of race relations in the United States.

The last election suggests that much discus-

sion in the first two areas is quixotic, because there does not seem to be any political support for social democratic public policies or much energy available for the social democratic coalitional strategies traditionally supported by the democratic left. Talk of labor-law reform, for example, is certainly important, but such reform requires a political party committed to reformist strategies, with some chance of winning governmental power. The same could be said about welfare reform, comparable worth, or innovative forms of public investment. There is little or no support for such programs.

The democratic left needs to shift its focus. Its social democratic vision needs to be enriched by a more radically democratic understanding of the legitimacy crisis of the welfare state and of social democratic politics more generally. We need to take more seriously the rhetoric with which Republicans rode to power. Consider the Republican "social contract" promoted by Gingrich. What are its main concerns? A number of points stand out: the federal government has become too bureaucratic; Congress has become too entrenched; we need to restore the Tocquevillean spirit of voluntarism that made America great; we need to retrieve our Jeffersonian heritage of local, self-reliant citizenship—a citizenship supported by disciplined moral character rather than by a politics of victimology and resentment.

These are powerful themes, more powerful than the banalities typically purveyed by Democratic politicians (it was Clinton's strength in 1992 that he projected some of these themes; it is his enormous failure that he failed to push any of them once in office). They appeal deeply to an electorate long subjected to powerful forces beyond its control. The irony, of course, is that for the Republicans these commitments are rhetorical rather than real. For all their talk of bureaucracy, they wish dramatically to strengthen the bureaucratic state, expanding the military-industrial complex, the prison system, and the policing powers of the state; enforcing a ban on abortions; and, in Gingrich's more utopian reveries, instituting a punitive welfare policy that would remove poor children from the care

of their "derelict" parents and effectively make them wards of the state.

For all their talk of entrenched political interests and congressional gridlock, the party of Phil Gramm and Jesse Helms is as entrenched as the Democrats, expert in the arts of pork barreling and logrolling. For all their talk of voluntarism, they support an economic policy that enriches wealthy Americans and bureaucratic corporate institutions at the expense of ordinary citizens, and a social policy dictated by privileged elites and entrenched interests like the insurance industry and the NRA. Their talk of self-reliance masks a barely veiled politics of ethnic and racial resentment directed against such "threats" to American decency as immigrants, criminals (read urban African-Americans), gays and lesbians, arrogant Eastern "intellectuals," and, in the case of the Christian Coalition, those who threaten the "Christian" character of the nation (particularly Jews but often Catholics and Muslims as well). And their talk of Jeffersonian democracy masks a commitment to free markets that, in the era of the global, transnational corporation, routinely displace and disenfranchise those local sources of power that were the bulwark of Jefferson's vision.

The reality of the "Contract With America," in other words, gives the lie to its rhetoric. But the rhetoric is important. It is a rhetoric of civic initiative and political empowerment, a vision of what we might call participatory democracy. The "social contract" taps into a widespread sentiment that Americans have lost control of their country and that something needs to be done to right this wrong. It would be foolhardy to dismiss this rhetoric of empowerment. Instead, the democratic left must try to make democratic empowerment real. This constitutes a double challenge.

On the one hand, it requires us to shift away from many of our traditional concerns—centering around a social democratic-type party and the use of state power to redress injustice—toward a more grass-roots, localist, voluntarist conception of democratic politics. Such a politics is no doubt more improvisational, fragmented, and melioristic than a unifying social democratic vision, but it is also more

realistic, given the current state of affairs. This does not mean the wholesale abandonment of the welfare state or the politics of redistributive justice. But it does mean that these commitments need to be recast in more democratically accountable ways, and justified in a language of civic responsibility and solidarity.

On the other hand, we must clarify what we mean by the idea of democracy itself. Talk about civic initiative and grass-roots participation, long a staple of the left, is insufficient, if we are to distinguish between such participatory "initiatives" as California's Proposition 187 or the Christian Coalition's conquest of local school boards and genuinely democratic political activities. We need to think more about what distinguishes xenophobic civic initiatives from legitimate democratic disputes about social boundaries, and a politics of resentment from healthy argumentation about the limits of different forms of social provision and civil justice.

What might distinguish a more genuinely democratic politics from the Republican "Contract with America"? Self-questioning rather than self-righteousness. Egalitarianism rather than the Social Darwinist legitimization of hierarchy. Genuine civic responsibility rather than recrimination and resentment. A commitment to liberal values of toleration and free expression rather than a blunt majoritarianism. These values need to be more systematically articulated and connected with a politics of democratic empowerment that builds from the ground up, and that sees a more localist politics as a strategic and an ethical imperative.

It seems to me that there is simply no other way to think realistically about how to advance democratic politics. Cornelius Castoriadis, in a recent *Dissent* essay ("The Crisis of Marxism, The Crisis of Politics," Spring 1992), observes that the historical conditions of the socialist project no longer obtain, and that the new conditions pose tremendous obstacles to the politics of the democratic left. Democratic politics, he notes, "is not a political endeavor like any other. It can only be realized by the autonomous activity of the people. And it is

precisely this activity that, in the present period, is dramatically absent."

There are, to be sure, oases in the political desert. The magazine *Social Policy*, for example, regularly reports on community organizing efforts. Harry Boyte is organizing a new network called the American Civic Forum, which seeks to connect them. Civic initiatives are being undertaken by feminists, trade unionists, ecologists, and minority groups to redress long-standing grievances like sexual violence, corporate downsizing, environmental racism, and urban neglect. But these are still oases. Much more common are pseudo-democratic efforts like United We Stand, Proposition 187, and the Republican "social contract." And more common still is mass cynicism and indifference, ripe for demagogic exploitation.

The weakness of genuinely democratic political agencies should lead us indeed to a pessimism of the intellect, but also to a tempering of the will. Only a more modest, localist democracy now makes sense for the democratic left in America. There is a great danger in this kind of grass-roots politics, the danger of what Margaret Weir called in these pages "defensive localism" ("Urban Poverty and Defensive Localism," *Dissent*, Summer 1994). For it seems to feed into a politics that, at least since the first Reagan administration, has sought to scale back public provision and economic regulation, and to throw profound problems upon largely powerless state and

local governments. The result is that the most vulnerable men and women in an increasingly volatile global economy suffer from fiscal austerity and drastic cutbacks.

Surely such a "defensive localism" should be challenged, and many of the policies of democratic liberalism need to be defended. But in order to defend them we must reconceive them in ways that take account of the deep reservoir of distrust that has built up in the society as a whole. It is important to say that no one ought to be left helpless before the vagaries of the market, and that public assistance for the vulnerable, poor, and disadvantaged is democratic and just. But this needs to be articulated in terms of a conception of civic responsibility and democratic empowerment and linked to grass-roots community organizations and local forms of government through which citizens can really make a difference. Otherwise, defenses of social welfare will simply fall on the deaf ears of people who would rather support initiatives like Proposition 187. I am not saying that democrats should pander to such people. Quite the contrary. I am saying that the only way to counter such initiatives is to take seriously their Jeffersonian rhetoric (for an interesting attempt, see Staughton Lynd's "A Jobs Program for the '90s," in *Social Policy*, Fall 1994).

There are many good reasons to resist what I am saying in the name of more traditional conceptions of social democratic politics. It may be that the last election will be of only a passing significance, and that it would be mistaken to draw any serious conclusions from it. But most people on the democratic left have known for some time that New Deal politics—social democracy, American-style—is at an impasse. This does not mean that the Republicans have reshaped the political landscape. But it does mean that they have discovered a way to tap long-standing American notions of "grass-roots" politics. The challenge for the democratic left is not to mimic the right, but to mobilize the rhetoric and the reality of a genuinely democratic politics. □

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Nicolaus Mills

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION ON THE ROPES

It is called the California Civil Rights Initiative (CCRI), and if enacted, it would end affirmative action in California. The state and its subdivisions would be prohibited from using race, color, sex, ethnicity, or national origin to discriminate against or grant preferential treatment to any individual or group.

The result would be no set-asides for minority contractors, no special admissions programs for colleges, no race-based hiring in government jobs. In a state in which an estimated five thousand white men were told recently that they could not take the qualifying test for the Los Angeles Fire Department until it met its minority and gender hiring goals, the CCRI has become the wedge issue.

For California Governor Pete Wilson, who used his support of Proposition 187, the referendum that would deny most publicly funded services to illegal aliens, to win a come-from-behind victory over liberal Kathleen Brown, the CCRI may even be the issue that makes him a presidential candidate. After months of testing the California political waters, Wilson has formally endorsed the initiative. "I don't think that it's fair to give preferences based on race or gender," he declared when asked about the CCRI. "I think that what we should do is make those judgments based upon merit after affording real equality and opportunity of success."

The CCRI is the brainchild of Thomas Wood, the executive director of the conservative California Association of Scholars, and Glynn Custred, an anthropology professor at California State University at Hayward. Their headquarters are in a tiny office on Martin Luther King, Jr. Way in Berkeley, but the smallness of their operation belies the impor-

tance the CCRI has for California and the nation. No other single piece of legislation promises so clear a referendum on American politics in the nineties.

Last year the CCRI was introduced in the State Assembly by Republican Bernie Richter of Chico. It died in the Judiciary Committee. At the time it was opposed by both the black and Hispanic caucuses, and in 1995 it is certain to have their opposition again. Liberal anger with the initiative runs deep. As Eva Paterson, the executive director of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights in San Francisco, observed in an interview in the *Washington Post*, "You can call it Willie Horton goes to college."

Wood and Custred are not worried about the initiative being defeated in the State Assembly. They believe that political momentum is on their side and that the passage of Proposition 187 by such a wide margin shows that voters are angry and willing to take matters into their own hands.

It will take 615,000 signatures to get the CCRI on the ballot for 1996, but given the interest the initiative has already aroused, that task can be easily accomplished with enough financing. The initiative has the support of such conservative Republicans as William Buckley and Pat Buchanan, as well as former Secretary of Education William Bennett.

Republicans are increasingly confident the CCRI will force the electorate to choose between them and a Democratic party wedded to minority preferences. Their confidence is easy to understand. The Civil Rights Act of 1991 notwithstanding, current support for affirmative action hangs by a thread. A *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News survey found that two out of three Americans oppose affirmative

action, and according to a *Los Angeles Times* poll, 73 percent of Californians support the CCRI.

The best case for affirmative action was made thirty years ago by President Lyndon Johnson as the South's Jim Crow laws were being dismantled. "You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains," Johnson declared, "liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, 'You are free to compete with all others' and still justly believe you have been completely fair." What Johnson had in mind by way of fairness were the job training and education programs of the Great Society. In the prosperous 1960s there was no sense that affirmative action might be a zero-sum game in which one group's gain was another group's loss.

However, since the 1960s affirmative action has come to be a zero-sum game for many. At the 95,000 companies employing the 27 million workers covered by federal affirmative action programs, the policy often means hiring one person over another in order to meet a mandated goal. A parallel situation is true for colleges, where in the name of diversity a student with lower test scores and grades is often accepted over one more academically qualified. To make matters worse, with the passage of time it has become increasingly difficult to determine who deserves the preference affirmative action brings. Does the black youngster from the suburbs merit extra consideration? If so, what do we say to the unemployed mineworker's son from West Virginia who may have received a far worse education?

The result is that opinion on affirmative action tends to break down along many of the

same racial and ethnic lines that divide American society. Those who see themselves benefiting from affirmative action regard it as a social necessity. Those who see themselves being hurt by it regard it as unfair. It is hardly surprising that a *New York Times*/CBS poll found that 71 percent of blacks, as compared to just 17 percent of whites, favor affirmative action.

The CCRI thus presents Democrats and Republicans with very different challenges. At stake for the Democrats is their ability to win major elections. They can oppose the CCRI and become still further identified as the party of minorities in America. Or they can break with their past and declare that the time has come to replace affirmative action with a more inclusive liberalism in which real equality—beginning with identical funding for suburban and urban schools—becomes the goal of social policy. The problem is that the longer Democrats wait to make such a break with their past, the less likely the decision is to strike voters as principled. Before affirmative action is buried at the polls, Democrats need to begin negotiations for the programs that would replace it by reaching out to all in need.

For Republicans, on the other hand, the CCRI provides every incentive to stay with the politics of meanness that brought them into power in 1994. They have already made the welfare and balanced-budget issues theirs. If they can do the same with affirmative action, they will have redefined the politics of the decade. What is more, they will have done so by taking from the Democrats the moral ideal on which the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 rest—the belief that we are a colorblind nation in which racial entitlements have no place. □

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LESSONS FROM THE BOSNIAN WAR

T

he European Community (EC), the United States, and the United Nations have all contributed mightily to the death of Yugoslavia and the murder of Bosnia. German and Austrian overeagerness to recognize unilateral declarations of secession by Slovenia and Croatia assured that there would not be a peaceful parting of the ways.

The federation that was Yugoslavia was a much lesser evil than the horror that followed. Yes, it was a one-party regime with as many as five hundred political prisoners during most of the last decade of its existence, but with the exception of the Albanians in Kosovo, it was not dominated by its largest national group. Since the purge of the head of political police, Alexander Rankovic, no Serb had been a major figure in the Yugoslav Federation for the last twenty years of the country's existence. Tito was a Croat, the major party ideologue Kardelj, a Slovenian. In office at the time the country broke up in 1991 were Prime Minister Markovic, a Croat; Foreign Minister Loncar, a Croat; President of the Party Presidium Suvar, a Croat; and Chief of Staff Kadijevic, the product of a mixed Serb-Croat marriage. The ambassadors in Moscow, Paris, Vienna, Rome, and at the UN were Croats. The ambassador to Washington was a Bosnian.

The reason to insist upon these facts is that legions of half-informed commentators are now busy rewriting history to portray the breakup of Yugoslavia as inevitable and justified. The breakup was caused by policies that saw all of Eastern Europe through the prism of the cold war. Breaking up and fatally weakening any state ruled by any Communist party was axiomatically a good thing. Secessionist ethnic nationalism was automatically a good thing for Yugoslavia (or the Soviet Union for that

matter), unlike South Africa, India, Pakistan, Nigeria, or Indonesia.

Pressures to democratize and decentralize the country without breaking it apart would have been welcomed by substantial forces in Yugoslavia. But these pressures were absent. In 1991, the European Community's arbitrator, Lord Carrington, counseled against recognizing any of the former Yugoslav states without a settlement that would guarantee the rights of all minorities. The EC's failure to accept his recommendation led to the violent assault on the seceding states by the Yugoslav army and large Serbian minorities in Croatia and Bosnia.

Having made the first fatal mistake of welcoming unilateral secession, the UN, the EC, and the sole remaining superpower then failed to move to stop the violence at the very outset. They might have succeeded by providing for guarantees of equal rights to ethnic communities that were now violently thrust into an insecure existence as minorities in the lands in which their ancestors have lived since at least the early sixteenth century. After they failed to do this, two million Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia were unsurprisingly unwilling to trust their security to the new nationalist regimes in which they had become minorities overnight. Instead, they successfully launched a combined civil war and war of aggression, much like the war in Lebanon, exposing the inadequacy of the UN security system, the weakness of the EC, and the hopeless drift in U.S. foreign and security policy.

The lesson is: without a world community or superpower that can assure minimal security, military force becomes an attractive way of solving one's problems, and to hell with world opinion. World opinion will not save victims of ethnic genocides and massacres. This lesson

will not be missed by hawks in Israel as well as those, like the Russian leadership, who have a genuine problem with neighboring nationalist regimes that want to make their Russian minorities pay for the past crimes of Stalinist and Russian imperialism.

To be sure, the breakup of Yugoslavia and the wars that followed had probably become likely even earlier—in 1986-1989, when the Serbian strongman Milosevic attempted to bully his way into power over all of Yugoslavia by mobilizing nationalist mobs, destroying the autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina, and signaling his intention to tear up the existing Yugoslav federal Constitution. Milosevic thus provoked the secession of Slovenia and Croatia and helped thrust the Croat right-wing nationalists into power in Croatia in 1991.

But in 1991 the world community still could have put its weight behind the numerous anti-Milosevic forces in Yugoslavia and pushed for decentralization and democratization. However, there was and still is great reluctance to “intervene in internal affairs of sovereign states,” since more than one UN member, even among members of the Security Council, would have to worry about precedents if forces for democracy, human rights, and local autonomy were to start receiving international support.

Intimidation of the substantial Serbian minority by the Croat nationalists and systematic manipulation by Belgrade of all-too-vivid memories of massacres perpetrated by Croat fascists during the Second World War produced a revolt in the mainly Serbian Croat borderlands known as the Kraina. In the war that followed, the Yugoslav army took the side of the Kraina Serbs. After much wanton destruction by the invading army, including the razing of Vukovar and the shelling of Dubrovnik, a UN-policed truce line was established that has left more than a quarter of Croatia under rebel Serbian rule, cutting off the land links to Dalmatia and Slavonia. Any normalization and democratization of politics in Croatia requires the peaceful reintegration of the Kraina into Croatia. This can happen only if national rights and local autonomy are internationally guaranteed to the Kraina Serbs.

Croatia must become a state of all of its citizens rather than a de facto exclusive ethnic state of Croats. Without peace, democratic and civic rights are in constant jeopardy, and without those, Croatia will never get into the EC or obtain economic aid to rebuild the country. Croat nationalists and their liberal salon sympathizers, who have never met an ethnic nationalism they did not like, are the worst enemies of a decent democratic Croatia.

In Bosnia, war became inevitable when the Bosnian Serbian nationalist leader Karadjic set up a secessionist government in Banja Luka months before the March 1992 referendum in which the majority of Moslem and Croat Bosnian citizens voted for independence. The referendum was opposed by most Bosnian Serbs, a third of the population of Bosnia. The more chauvinist Bosnian Croats, supported by the Croatian government, set up an ethnically “cleansed,” purely Croat pseudo-state of Herceg-Bosnia, being no more willing to accept an independent Bosnia dominated by its most numerous group, the Moslem Slavs, than were the Serb nationalists.

The people who *genuinely* favored a multi-ethnic secular Bosnian state were the urban cosmopolitans, who had generally declared themselves to be Yugoslavs in the censuses; the substantial urban population that was intermarried; and of course the democratic left, which holds power in the second largest Bosnian city, Tuzla, and represents the main parliamentary opposition to the increasingly Islamic Izetbegovic government in Sarajevo. These groups are systematically ignored in all proposed settlements for the Bosnian War, as well as by the UN, the United States, and the EC. Their very existence is an embarrassment, since it argues against the creation of ethnic ghettos as the only viable solution.

The prospects for Bosnia today are much worse than they were two years ago. Partition was by no means inevitable then. Now it may be too late to reverse the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, too late to reverse the Serbian territorial conquests, too late to punish the Serbian and Croatian chauvinist thugs. Instead, they will be rewarded. They have labored mightily and bloodily for two years to split a

working Bosnian multi-ethnic society into ethnically exclusive bantustans, something that even the whites in South Africa gave up on.

After the failure of international institutions it is naive to have much confidence in any international guarantees in the Balkans. Therefore, settlements acceptable to the warring parties and that include at least a majority of the Croatian and Bosnian Serbs are now the only possibility for peace. It is too late to lift the unjust arms embargo, which makes it more difficult for the Bosnian government to get heavy weapons. Lifting the embargo would only prolong the war unless the same world community that had cravenly refused to defend safety zones in Bosnia intervened massively to

defeat the Bosnian and Croatian Serbs. Lifting the arms embargo is a demand of the U.S. hawks, who will fight to the last Bosnian but not risk a single U.S. professional soldier. It is cheap demagoguery.

Serbian and Croatian nationalists claimed that it was impossible for the different national communities to live together in one state. Through atrocities, organized mass rape, and destruction of cities, mainly by the Serbian forces, this became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Because of endless delays and failures to exercise any leadership by the United States and its allies, it is now probably too late to restore a nonsectarian civic Bosnian state. But we must at least try to save the Bosnians. □

Daniel Bell

WILL THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BE THE PACIFIC CENTURY?

As we approach the millennial year 2000, there seems to be a general expectation that the twenty-first century will be the Pacific Century. After about two thousand years of European-centered civilization as we know it (in philosophy, religion, and science) and five hundred years of European and then American economic and political dominance, will the center of gravity and the new tidal forces move to the Pacific, as once they had been concentrated in the Mediterranean and then shifted to the Atlantic rim? Much of this expectation arises from the fact that in 1960, 4 percent of the world's GNP was generated by the East Asian economies, that in 1990 this rose to 25 percent, and by the year 2000 this may well be 33 1/3 percent.

Yet given this fact, the question may be

raised whether economic might translates itself into political and military and cultural leadership, or despite China's still growing so rapidly (though inflation prone), whether the curve of Asian economic activity may not be reaching an asymptote, a ceiling that suggests a slowdown in the future.

The Pacific community suggests the fifteen nations that make up the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) organization that began in 1989, centering primarily around Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, and China, as well as the United States and Canada. But in thinking in historical terms, we are dealing here primarily with Asian nations. We leave aside India and the former Soviet Union. India is not involved in the trading blocs of the Pacific region, and there

remains a question whether, with the decline of the Congress party, there is a cohesive enough force to keep the nation together. The former Soviet Union is now, effectively, divided into three blocs: Russia, which is primarily the European area, but which is preoccupied with the Ukraine and threats from ethnic groups in Azerbaijan and Chechnya; the Central Asian Republics—Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan—which are increasingly independent; and Siberia, which, while nominally part of Russia, is now increasingly oriented to the Pacific rim, of which it is a part. All this reduces the role of Moscow as a major player in the Pacific region.

If we are to assess the future of the Pacific/Asian community, we may see this best, not nation by nation, but along several different dimensions, even though these, in practice, overlap: (a) economic, (b) political, (c) military/security, and (d) cultural.

And beyond these, two further aspects: (e) authoritarian versus democratic government and (f) stability and the role of institutionalized succession, or the possibilities of peaceful political change over generational time.

The Economic Dimension

Most measures of economic performance deal with gross domestic product (GDP), or trade, or capital investment, or productivity and other such narrow economic measures. But for historical analysis, it is more useful, I think, to use *institutional* frameworks and see where nations or economies stand in these terms.

There is a crucial distinction between *initiating* products (that is, invention and innovation) and *making* products. This is also set within a historical context: the change from an agrarian to an industrial to a postindustrial (or more specifically an information) society. Therefore, the way we assess the character of a society is by locating it within these distinctions.

In addition, there is a “technological ladder”: (i) light manufacturing (e.g., textiles and shoes); (ii) heavy industry (e.g., steel, shipbuilding, automobiles, engineering); (iii) petro-

chemical (e.g., plastics); (iv) “high-tech” (e.g., instruments and optics, electronics and telecommunications, computers and microprocessors); and (v) science-based (e.g., biotechnology, space and satellites, materials science—like fiber optics for copper).

These are not automatic sequences for economies, but different capacities. The *making* of products depends on standardization within production and cheap labor costs. The *initiation* of products depends upon a large knowledge-based college-educated class who are given the opportunity to initiate new products.

Viewed within this context, the growth of economies such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and to some extent South Korea and China, has occurred because these countries have taken over the production of goods largely because of cheaper labor costs and standardization. A country such as Japan, which has been far in the lead in climbing the “technological ladder,” finds itself competing with South Korea in shipbuilding and steel, and increasingly in semiconductors and consumer electronics. At the same time, Japan has been forced, because of labor costs and the exchange rate of the yen, to relocate production facilities for autos and electronics to the United States, Great Britain and, in Southeast Asia, to Thailand and Malaysia. In this “cycle” even the late-coming “tigers” are relocating labor-intensive products such as textiles and shoes and cheap electronic items to “sweated” economies such as China and Vietnam.

All this suggests that the spectacular Southeast Asian growth rates of the last two decades—which may continue into the first decade of the twenty-first century—could reach an asymptote—a slowdown, if not a ceiling.

Economic growth rates are a product, basically, of the mobilization of resources and the education of a labor force. The large increases in industrial *production* (but not productivity) in the Soviet Union in the Stalin period came from the transfer of labor from the agrarian to the industrial sector, and the concentration on specific industrial targets through a command system of the physical allocation of materials and labor—but at a

tremendous cost in efficiency and misuse of capital, all of which became increasingly evident in the Brezhnev period. Japan's economic growth rates began not after World War II but in the Meiji restoration, beginning in the nineteenth century, when leaders such as General Yamagata and the civilian Prince Ito self-consciously chose the German model of state-led economic mobilization. And the postwar cooperation of the two *batsu* (cliques), the bureaucracy and business, guided Japan's renewed growth.

Many Southeast Asian countries, as a recent report of the Morgan Stanley bank suggest, may be near the limits of their potential growth could face unmanageable inflation in the future.

The iconoclastic economist Paul Krugman argued in the November/December 1994 issue of *Foreign Affairs* that the growth rates of certain Asian economies, such as that of Singapore, came from huge investments in physical capital and the educational upgrading of the labor force, which may have reached a limit. China, with its one billion population, seems to be poised for a take-off, yet as the Hong Kong economist Henry K.H. Woo argues in his new book *The Making of a New China Mind*, the competitive requirements for an economy in the postindustrial age are a knowledge base and intellectual capability. Existing knowledge bases have a high rate of obsolescence, and a nation needs the capacity to replace obsolete knowledge and adapt or initiate the new. China, given its historic Confucian system, the rigidities introduced by the totalitarian regime, and the virtual destruction of an older intellectual class, may be handicapped in moving into the postindustrial sectors of economic development.

Japan, and to some extent South Korea, may be best suited to adaptation if there is an expansion in the economic role of the new science-based industries, in particular the revolutions in materials science. But Japan has other problems—an aging population and “social deficits” in housing and other dimensions of the quality of life. Korea has both the threat of the North and the tight control of the older *chaebols* (interlocking business groups),

which may inhibit new entrepreneurial initiatives.

Toward a Pacific Community?

The crucial question is whether the Pacific rim countries will become a Pacific *community*. In Europe during the twentieth century, the major powers fought two devastating world wars with each other, but today there is a common market and the framework of a European community. With the North American Free Trade Agreement, the United States and its neighbors are developing a common market, and although there may not be a formal North American community, it is clear that on political issues there are few differences between the United States and its neighbors.

This is not the situation in Asia. There is first a heritage of conflict. Between 1890 and 1941, Japan went to war four times—against Korea, Russia, China, and the United States. The occupation of Korea and many Southeast nations, such as Indonesia and Singapore, still rankles. Nonetheless, what is evident today is the large degree of intra-Asian trade. Taiwan is now the largest foreign investor in Malaysia and Vietnam. Hong Kong and Taiwan account for more than two-thirds of foreign direct investment in China. Japan is the largest investor in Thailand. And, somewhat surprisingly, Japan is China's largest trading partner. Between 1989 and 1993, Sino-Japanese trade increased from about \$20 billion to \$35 billion, and Japanese investment in China quintupled from \$440 million to over \$2.5 billion. In that same period of time the share of East Asian exports to the United States market fell from 34.1 percent in 1986 to 24.2 percent in 1992, indicating a turn away from dependence on the United States to increased trade flows and investment within Asia.

Yet little of this has translated itself into effective regional political cooperation. There are the Association of East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Asian Regional Forum (ARF) and the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation organization (APEC), which meet regularly, but all that these organizations seem to do is to have their leaders enjoy one another's lavish

hospitality and have their pictures taken. In 1990, Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad of Malaysia proposed an East Asian Economic Group, which evolved into a caucus known as EAEC, though it is unclear how this differs from the APEC, other than in making strong anti-American statements.

There are, still, small territorial claims between Asian nations. Besides the Japanese dispute with Russia over the Kuriles, there is an argument among China, Japan, and Taiwan over the Senkaku islands, about two hundred miles north of Taiwan in the East China Sea, which may have large oil reserves. There are also claims to the possibly oil-rich areas of the Spratly and Paracel islands in the South China Sea, which are disputed by China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei! Finally, there are the "flashpoints" between North and South Korea that threaten, often, to escalate into conflict, and are the basis for the continuing American military presence in Asia, since the United States has already withdrawn from the Philippines.

The key to any political community in Asia is China. It is clear that communist ideology no longer can be the binding force of the country. But what can take its place? The most obvious candidate is *nationalism*. China has long held its culture to be superior, historically, to the other nations of the world. And there has long been a xenophobic strain in the attitude of China to other nations. Nationalism instills a sense of pride and identity within a people. But nationalism also often requires an enemy against which to mobilize a society. Under Mao Zedong, the society was mobilized against "class enemies" within and imperialism without. Nowadays these themes have little meaning. There is the old enmity with Russia, but Russia is no longer a player in the Pacific arena. Historically, Hanoi was an enemy, but Vietnam today is too small and pitiful. That leaves Japan and the United States, but China has mixed feelings toward both because of the necessity for technology and trade. And it remains uncertain whether, after Deng, China can hold itself together and not fall prey to internal regional rivalries. Many open questions remain.

Military and Security Questions

Few societies can exercise economic and political power without having some military force, where necessary, to back up their power or to provide security against other powers. Security remains, as always, an ever-present problem between nations. Although there have not been any large-scale land conflicts in Asia for the past twenty years, an uneasiness remains, principally because there is no Asian version of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which serves as a forum for negotiation. There is a Five Power Defense arrangement, which binds together Malaysia, Singapore, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. The United States maintains bilateral security treaties with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Australia, and New Zealand, together with the hundred thousand forward-positioned American troops stationed in East Asia, and backed by the Seventh Fleet.

Military forces in Asia have been growing. Asia has six of the world's eight largest standing armies: China (3.03 million troops); India (1.265 million troops); North Korea (1.13 million troops); Vietnam (857,000 troops); South Korea (633,000 troops); and Pakistan (577,000 troops). Defense spending in the region has been increasing, as many nations are seeking to modernize their forces, and many advanced fighter planes and modern naval vessels have been introduced.

China, in particular, has been engaged in a military modernization program. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has received five consecutive years of double-digit budget increases, and is buying a range of sophisticated weapons from Russia. It is also expanding its navy and air force, and upgrading its nuclear-weapon arsenal as well as adopting a new military doctrine that emphasizes rapid deployment.

The more immediate issue for China is Taiwan, which has been purchasing anti-ship missiles and airplanes from the United States. China has simulated a naval blockade of Taiwan, and in September 1994 undertook

large-scale joint-services maneuvers off its coast just north of Taiwan.

Japan has been increasing its defense budget. As an article in *Foreign Affairs* reports: "With the launch of its H-2 rocket last February, Tokyo has a potential ballistic missile and independent reconnaissance capability." Its civilian nuclear reprocessing program will give Japan access to perhaps fifty or more tons of plutonium, and it is building its theatre missile defenses.

The linchpin of Asian security, so far, has been the United States, with its bilateral security arrangements in the region and its status as the world's strongest and most technologically advanced military power.

But increasingly, the United States has been reluctant to intervene militarily in different parts of the world, especially with land troops. If in the next years there is an overt threat to security—say, an action of North Korea against South Korea—the United States would probably rely more on providing technology rather than direct military action. And Washington would be very hesitant to intervene in the array of other territorial disputes—Japan and Russia, China and Taiwan, China and Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia.

To sum up: there has been so much attention to Asia's economic growth and to trade that security matters have been largely overlooked. Yet in any realistic perspective, these remain major, unsolved issues.

Cultural Issues

Culture can be looked at in two different dimensions. One is the "ethos or values" of a country that, embodied usually in religion, gives it a distinctive stamp that marks it off from other "cultures." The other is the "expressive" products in the arts and literature and styles of a society that display its "creative" contributions.

As to the first, there has been considerable attention in the last two years to the thesis of Harvard's Samuel Huntington that the old divisions between nations, based on economics and ideology, will now be replaced by a new divide based upon cultural conflicts. There are,

he contends, "Confucian civilizations" and "Islamic civilizations," which will be increasingly opposed to "the West," as the bearer of modernity; this, in turn, will be translated into a new global politics. On the "Confucian" side he placed China and North Korea, but not Japan. The "Islamic" side was centered in the Middle East.

As I have argued elsewhere, I think this perspective is confusing and wrong. There have long been such "civilizational" distinctions and, to a considerable extent, with the exception of fundamentalist movements in the Arab Middle East, Iran, and North Africa, they have even tended to diminish. It makes little sense to think of China as a "Confucian" civilization, especially as the materialist impulses of economic development are running rampant there. To identify Islam so completely with fundamentalists in the Arab world and Iran ignores the two largest Islamic countries in the world, Indonesia and Turkey. There may well be, in the future, *political* conflicts between China and the West, but these would derive from historic great-power shifts, rather than from "culture."

What is most important is the impact of "modernity" on Asia, and the fear that "modernity," as we have seen it in the West, entails a challenge to traditional values and to traditional structures, especially the patriarchal family. At its best, modernity has meant the extension of personal freedom, particularly in life styles. At its worst, modernity has meant the overstepping of boundaries to encourage drugs, pornography, libertinism, and the lack of individual responsibility for one's actions. There is now, in the West, a reaction against such excesses, and this is reflected, too, in an exaggerated degree, in religious fundamentalist movements. But there is one historic gain from modernity that cannot be reversed, and this is the greater equality for women and the right of women to make their own decisions, rather than as subordinate to men. And the gains in personal freedom may remain as well.

The other dimension of culture is artistic. Historically, as nations have emerged upon the

world scene, this has been accompanied by an upsurge in creativity. This has usually been called the realm of "high culture," and Japan provides a bright illustration of it. In the post-World War II period, Japanese culture made a dramatic impact on the West, as great perhaps as the period a hundred years ago when *Japonisme*, particularly the Ukiyo-e prints, had a major impact on the style of Degas, Whistler, Vuillard and other Western artists. There were the novels of Tanizaki, Kawabata, Mishima, Abe; the films of Kurosawa and Ozu; the modern Noh plays of Yamazaki; the architecture of Tange, and other dazzling forms of expression. But much of this has dimmed and there has been notably little impact on world culture by other Asian countries, with the small exception of some of the newer films from China.

What seems to have happened is an erosion of the distinction between high and low culture, in favor of mass culture, and the erosion of cultural boundaries, as in the novels of Murakami and Endo.

All of this is a loss, both for the distinctive cultures of each society, as well as for world culture, which has always been fructified and renewed by the vigor of newly powerful societies. In Japan, there has been a return, somewhat, to traditional modes, such as the tea ceremony or flower arrangements and to certain crafts; satisfying as these may be for the individuals who reclaim them, they do not represent new creative impulses that can expand world culture. All this may be an open question, but my surmise is that the mass consumer culture of the West, particularly of the United States, reinforced by the new technological tricks of video and computer games and animation, will swamp Asia (Japan may already have been swamped). The contributions of the grand historic cultures of China and Japan may end up only in the museums, not in the lives of people.

Democracy and "Institutionalized Succession"

Other than the Philippines, after the forced departure of Marcos, and an isolated vote in Thai-

land in 1975, democratic elections for president never directly caused a change of government in East or Southeast Asia prior to the early 1990s. Most regimes were military dictatorships or one-party states that rarely tolerated opposition. These were also state-led economies in which policy (and often administration) was coordinated by bureaucracy, and where labor movements were repressed or bought off.

There are now the beginnings of change. Japan has been the model of a stable political regime for more than forty years. It was, however, dominated by one party that rested on a coalition of factions whose strength depended on an electoral system that favored the rural voter and the ruling (Liberal-Democratic) party. The victory, briefly, of Morihiro Hosokawa's New Party "broke" that pattern last year. Electoral reforms and the probable realignments of parties may fashion a new political system. Yet how much power the political system has vis-à-vis the bureaucracy and the business *keiretsu* (interlocking companies) remains to be seen. Increasingly, the Japanese political world will have to make fateful choices, particularly in the areas of foreign policy and the questions of remilitarization. Tokyo can no longer rely, as it has, largely upon the United States for security. If it seeks a leading role in Asia, then it may need a stronger political—and military—voice.

South Korea made the transition—which is rare in politics—from a military to an open political system, paralleling, in this instance, Chile and Brazil. (In all three cases the military still plays an important background role.) Yet the transition is unmistakable and is probably irreversible. A consequence may be more political and labor turmoil, yet that is the price of democracy.

Throughout the rest of Asia, however, we see authoritarian regimes with a facade of elections and democracy. Singapore is the prime example. By imposing a strong discipline on the society, and regulating immigration (foreign workers usually have to leave after a few years' residence), Lee Kwan Yew has worked an "economic miracle." It is clear that Singapore has become the model for China in carrying out Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms. Hong Kong will become a

“mini-Singapore” when it is absorbed into China in 1997. In many respects, the regime of President Suharto in Indonesia functions on this authoritarian model, though with a higher degree of family control than in the other countries.

Few of these authoritarian states have provided for a structured peaceful succession of power once their old rulers have gone. Deng, Lee Kwan Yew, and Suharto still hold the reins of power but it is unlikely that they will be there at the end of the decade. Lacking institutionalized rules for succession, power struggles are bound to break out, especially in Indonesia and China where the military and the party, the two key instruments of power, are also economic machines. As such they face competitive threats from the outside which are different than the internal threats that they have been able to control. So it is likely that in the next few years we may see political turmoil in Asia: from competition of different elites for power; from the demands of new groups, such as a rising middle class, for inclusion in power; or from military conflicts as regimes seek to find “external” enemies in order to rally the society behind the regimes. Above all this is the looming presence of China, with its huge population, which has to find some new way of creating political stability and mastering the new economic forces it has unleashed.

Toward The Year 2000

There is little question that Asia is the most dynamic economic region in the world. Yet dynamism, while it creates growth *within* a society, cannot always control instabilities generated either by war or peace. In the past

twenty years, we have seen huge refugee populations flee from Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, and East Timor. China today has a “floating” population of more than one hundred million persons (almost the entire population size of Japan) as transient groups leave the farms and begin to flood the cities, a transition from agrarian to industrial societies that was barely managed in the past. (Probably it has only been the United States and Japan that have been able to make this transition with some relative stability.) The divisions between North Korea and South Korea, as well as China and Taiwan, remain to be resolved. Cambodia is still not a settled society, with the Khmer Rouge, aided to some extent by Thailand, still a disruptive force.

Trade among the societies of Asia is expanding rapidly, and economic growth (though often based on cheap labor) gives the region an expanding share of the world economy. But to return to the original question: Does all this make the Pacific rim a Pacific community? Will economic interdependence overcome historic animosities, such as those felt by Korea and China against Japan? In Europe animosities, as those between Germany and France, were overcome, but largely because there was a new common enemy—the Soviet Union—and a reliance on the United States for defense, through NATO, against a possible military threat. Much depends upon what kind of succession takes place in China and Indonesia. The change from military and authoritarian regimes to democracy and a reliance on trade, rather than war, are the prerequisites for the creation of a Pacific community. By the year 2000, we may have a clearer picture. □

**VISIT THE *DISSENT* BOOTH
AT THE SOCIALIST SCHOLARS CONFERENCE
APRIL 7–9, 1995
Borough of Manhattan Community College**

Albert O. Hirschman

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY MOVES SOUTH

At the beginning of the year, the political news in the United States was totally dominated by the results of the November elections: the takeover of Congress by the Republicans and in particular the installation of Newt Gingrich as Speaker of the House. Minimal attention was given to a simultaneous event: the inauguration of Fernando Henrique Cardoso as the first social democratic president of the United States of Brazil.

With one hundred and fifty-five million people, Brazil is, after the United States, the second most populous nation in the Western Hemisphere. It is also a major industrial power (turning out, for example, 1.5 million cars in 1994), and an increasingly important exporter of sophisticated industrial and diversified agricultural products (coffee is down to 2.5 percent of total exports). The country has a considerable political impact on the rest of Latin America. The overthrow of democracy in 1964 by a group of Brazilian generals was the beginning of a vicious authoritarian wave that engulfed a major part of the continent for two decades. When the Brazilian military decided to "retire from power" in 1985, the country returned to democratic forms, but then had to contend for almost a decade with weak or corrupt leaders as well as with economic instability and a recurring tendency to hyperinflation. Under these conditions, the accession of sixty-three-year old President Cardoso, the leader of Brazil's Social Democratic party (PSDB), on January 1 was widely greeted as a promise of genuine political renewal, the vigorous resumption of economic growth, and effective social reform. Some attention should

be paid to this "point of light" that has appeared in our hemisphere.

The success of Cardoso in the election of October 1994 is itself a remarkable story. The previous presidential election, in November 1989, had resulted in the victory of Fernando Collor, whose erratic and mediocre performance came to an early end in October 1992 when he was suspended (and eventually impeached) for corruption by the Congress. The vice president, Itamar Franco, took over as president for the two years of Collor's unexpired term. He asked Cardoso to join his government, first as minister of foreign affairs. The real challenge came six months later, in May 1993, when Cardoso was offered the Ministry of Finance. By now inflation had been running for some time at 30 percent a month (equal to a hyperinflation rate of over 1000 percent a year) and had proven to be a resilient disorder. With the help of a select group of economists, Cardoso undertook to learn what had worked and what hadn't in previous stabilization attempts and elaborated a program of his own.

He operated under considerable time pressure, for he now had presidential ambitions and, in accordance with the constitution, had to resign from any official position by March 1994 if he was to run for the presidency in October. Perhaps it was largely this pressure, in addition to the economists' advice, that convinced him to take an economically promising but politically difficult course: he first pushed through Congress a fiscal reform that transferred revenue from the states to the federal treasury and increased taxes. Only when the deficit had been thus contained did Cardoso proceed to the plan for monetary

stabilization that was actually implemented *after* his resignation, by his successor, in the second half of 1994. Inflation now dropped to the low single digits while a new currency, the *real*, was introduced and remained stable in relation to the dollar.

It turned out to be most helpful to Cardoso to be able to point to the success of his policies straight from the hustings. Earlier in the year, opinion polls had shown him lagging behind a number of other candidates, particularly Luis Inácio Silva, or "Lula," the leader of the Workers party (PT). From June on, Cardoso gained steadily and eventually overtook Lula, whose populist platform proved to have limited appeal. On October 3, he won the presidential contest in the first round, with 54 percent of the votes cast (as compared to 27 percent for Lula).

There is little doubt that Cardoso owed much of his success to the feat of stopping an inflation that had become a major curse of daily life in Brazil. In a sense Brazilians treated him as citizens have often treated victorious generals: having won a major battle or a war, they are appointed to the highest office, in the expectation that they will now be able to solve other major problems of their country. In the case of Cardoso, this generalized expectation was particularly easy for voters, because he had come to his task not as a monetary specialist, but as a broad-gauged intellectual who had learned much about the art of politics, serving as a federal senator since 1986.

Previously, Cardoso was widely (and internationally) known as a political sociologist who had opposed the military regime. After the 1964 coup, he lost his academic appointment and spent a short period of self-exile in Chile. Soon he returned to his country to build up, with his wife, Ruth, a prominent anthropologist, an independent social science center in São Paulo, with the help of the Ford Foundation.

Together with a Chilean colleague (Enzo Falletto) Cardoso had written a highly influential book, *Dependency and Development in Latin America*, in the late sixties. Here he had joined a group of other Latin American analysts who, dismayed by the economic difficulties of late indus-

trialization and by the new tendencies toward political authoritarianism, felt that Latin America's economic and political development was reaching a dead end. Ten years later, as Cardoso wrote a new preface to the English version of this book, he spoke in a far more open-ended fashion. Taking his distance from the earlier insistence on "structural constraints," he now emphasized the availability of "alternatives in history" and the "perception of new ways of turning a historical corner." He comes full circle another fifteen years later, in his inaugural speech of January 1. Now he expresses full confidence that such a historical corner is at hand. He repeats several times a colloquial expression: *Este país vai dar certo*—this time this country will do things right—it will succeed.

The meaning of such success is then spelled out along three principal lines. The "most precious gift" is liberty and democracy: here Cardoso speaks with considerable emotion—and some self-criticism—of the "people of my generation who learned about the value of liberty upon losing it." The second task is economic development based on monetary stability. Rapid industrialization had made Brazil into a "miracle" country during a good portion of the post-war period. Now that hyperinflation has been overcome, growth has already resumed and will be sustained.

The third area in which Brazil will now have to progress is that of social justice. The major unmet challenge for the country is the fight against hunger, poverty, and violence, and the achievement of substantial advances in health, education, and housing for the majority of the people. On an earlier occasion Cardoso had exclaimed: "Brazil is no longer an underdeveloped country. It is an unjust country."

There is little doubt that Cardoso will want to make advances in social justice into the major accomplishment of his administration. His country, he is convinced, is not facing a tragic dilemma between growth and distribution or between liberty and equity. He knows only too well how much intellectuals are given to presenting situations in terms of such inescapable dilemmas. They may well exist, but in that case it is the task of a political leader to devise ways around them.

Watching Fernando Henrique Cardoso and his team on January 1 in Brasilia, I could not help recalling an earlier hopeful inauguration, that of John F. Kennedy, and his famous phrase "Let the word go forth that the

torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans." Could it be that the torch—of democratic freedom and social justice—has been passed from the North to the South? □

Anson Rabinbach

GERMANY'S POSTCOMMUNISTS

If the devil is in the details, the controversy over street names in former East Berlin tells the story. In September 1993 Berlin's transport secretary, Herwig Haase, a Christian Democrat, impaneled an Independent Commission for the Renaming of Streets. Composed of four historians and several other prominent individuals, it was to make recommendations about twelve "politically compromised streets." These included large intersections such as the Rosa Luxemburg Platz and the Marx-Engels Platz, and main thoroughfares such as the Wilhelm Pieck Strasse (named for East Germany's first president) and the Clara Zetkin Strasse.

In March of 1994 the commission delivered its report: Marx, Luxemburg, and Karl Liebknecht could remain, but street names honoring communists who "actively contributed to the destruction of the first German Republic," like Zetkin Strasse, had to be changed. Instead Haase ignored the recommendations and asked only that Marx-Engels Platz and Pieck Strasse be renamed. One Social Democratic member of the commission, the historian Heinrich August Winkler, exploded. A conservative politician had "fallen to his knees," he charged, "capitulating" to the power of the former Communist party in Berlin.

Winkler acknowledged that Zetkin had been a prominent social democrat for forty years, and is considered by German feminists to be the founder of the women's rights movement.

But he denounced the outcome on the grounds that if a street could still be named for "a virulent Leninist" and a "champion of a totalitarian dictatorship," then the fate of Clara Zetkin Strasse demonstrated that "former East Berlin mentally still remains the capital of the GDR [German Democratic Republic, or East Germany] and not a part of the national capital of the Federal Republic of Germany."

The controversy goes to the heart of a larger question. Does a democratic and unified Germany require the public disavowal of GDR icons, or is a legitimate part of German history being erased? All this is part of the wider debate over whether a future role for the Social Democrats in the five new states must involve concessions to the former communists, whose showing in the last election was formidable. Once again in German history the question is being asked: should a party that has refused to draw a clear line separating itself from its past, and some of whose leaders took part in a totalitarian regime, participate equally in a German democracy?

For the Social Democrats, whose firm "no allies on the left" stance prevents them from governing in much of the East (apart from grand coalitions), the question is what price the party will pay for holding fast to the 1959 Bad Godesberg Program, which declared Marxism dead and cooperation with communists anathema. Does their principled position not also tacitly indict the party's attitude of compromise

with the Communist leadership during the era of "Ostpolitik"? These questions are essential to an understanding of the tumult caused by recent electoral successes of former communists in eastern Germany.

Helmut Kohl's squeak-through victory—by a mere ten seats in the Parliament—last October 16 demonstrated the weakness of what he openly admits is his last chancellorship, and it positioned the Social Democrats for participation in a grand coalition, or even for a victory if new elections are held before the current term ends. Most observers consider a coalition of the two larger parties likely in the next few years. Yet the big story in the election was not Kohl's tremulous triumph but the sharp decline of his liberal coalition partner, the Free Democratic party (FDP), and the remarkable comeback of the successor to the East German Communist party, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). Though the former communists won only 4.4 percent of the overall vote, they registered enormous gains in the East, winning more than 20 percent of the vote in such cities as Dresden, Leipzig, and Chemnitz, and winning a plurality in four East Berlin electoral districts. According to German electoral law, the Berlin seats entitle the PDS to be represented in Parliament even if the party's total vote falls short of five percent. As the third strongest party throughout the east (11 percent), the PDS commands a stable core of eastern voters and has become a potent factor in the complex arithmetic of coalition building.

The alarm rang this past summer after the state election in the small, deindustrialized, economically and ecologically ravaged eastern province of Saxony-Anhalt. The PDS won almost twenty percent of the vote, raising the specter of a "popular front" to the left of the ruling conservatives with the former communists playing a key role (even if they are not formally part of the governing coalition). The fall campaign was dominated by the scenario of the Social Democrats and the Greens governing in a minority coalition "tolerated" by the PDS. Wolfgang Schäuble, party chief of the CDU (Christian Democratic Union), called any hint of cooperation between the Social Democrats and the PDS "an unbelievable scandal in

German politics." Equally dismayed at the prospect, most Bonn Social Democrats rushed to declare unthinkable any "Red-Green" (Social Democrat and Green) coalition dependent on the former communists. If there were to be coalitions at the state level, they would be only with Kohl's Union, declared Rudolf Scharping, the Social Democratic candidate for chancellor: "There will be no conversations, no agreements, no negotiations, absolutely nothing with the PDS. Period. And that's final."

The problem is that the PDS represents a broad spectrum of former East German society, and has the overwhelming support of its intellectual "milieu." Its leader, the mediagenic lawyer Gregor Gysi, won handily over his SPD opponent, claiming 49 percent of the vote in his Berlin district. The party is remarkably heterogeneous; its membership ranges from hardline former communists to GDR opposition figures; from youthful Stalinists to anti-militarist, feminist, and environmentalist activists. The conventional "Wessi" (West German) view that the PDS represented unification's economic and social "losers," the aging victims of academic purges, political disenfranchisement, and unemployment, was shaken by the October results, which showed wide support even among younger and better off easterners. Jens Reich, a former GDR dissident and prominent figure in the Green/Alliance 90, explains that the PDS is a significant presence throughout the East, and that no other party offers knowledgeable, practical advice in matters arising from unification such as property, rents, pensions, labor issues, welfare, and debt. More important, the PDS gains its "strategic strength" from its adherence to what Reich calls the most enduring "axiom" of the communist epoch: that the market economy and "private property [are] the root of all injustice." Less charitable observers see the PDS as "populist" and "fundamentalist," a party of "east nostalgia" for the social advantages of the old GDR. Critics argue that the PDS's solidarity comes not so much from a sentimental attachment to the communist regime as from resentment against the West, from its vision of the missed opportunity for "third way socialism," from a shared regional history, and from a polit-

ical mentality expressed in Gysi's prideful claim that "unlike the other parties of the last 'People's Chamber' of the GDR, we did not subordinate and attach ourselves to a West German party."

The party's image in the West is not helped by its financial indiscretions. Shortly before Christmas the PDS was charged by the Finance Ministry with concealing a substantial part of the huge financial empire it inherited from the former Communist party, known as the Socialist Unity party (SED), when it disintegrated in 1989. The PDS claims that the ministry's calculations are entirely invented, that its own treasury is nearly depleted, and that the charges are aimed at pushing the PDS out of politics."

For many, however, the PDS remains the "successor party of the SED," not merely because of its membership and its financial ties to the past, but because of its failure to confront the issue of cooperation with the State Security Apparatus (*Stasi*). Its most decisive opponents, like the East Berlin Social Democrat Wolfgang Thierse, regard the party as an undemocratic residue of the old GDR: "The PDS will not become a democratic party just because it was democratically elected." Gysi himself has been implicated as an informer for the *Stasi*, and, like many PDS supporters, considers questions arising from the recent totalitarian past as an illegitimate imposition by westerners and an abuse of history. But there are also those in the PDS whose biographies attest to their opposition in the GDR, like writer and winning PDS candidate Stefan Heym, who, though he also cooperated with the *Stasi*, reminded Thierse that his files demonstrating that he was constantly being watched by the *Stasi* "comprise thirteen volumes." The success of Manfred Stolpe, who was elected minister president of Brandenburg in September by an overwhelming majority despite the fact that he frequently cooperated with the *Stasi* as president of the Evangelical church in the GDR, demonstrates that for eastern voters, collaboration with the old regime is not in itself a handicap. In the case of Stolpe, who is a Social Democrat, his collaboration may indeed have served a higher (church) purpose. Many in the GDR complain that the collaboration issue was distorted by the Western media, presented

without an adequate understanding of the choices people faced in the GDR. Many agree with Gysi, who maintains that support for the PDS "is not a product of the GDR, but of the Federal Republic."

Gysi's remark notwithstanding, those on the left who cut their teeth in the "cadre-parties" of the 1960s are experiencing déjà vu, calling the PDS a "*musée imaginaire*" of socialism. The PDS, Berlin journalist Klaus Hartung counters, is not primarily a party still devoted to communist principles but an expression of the failure of the unification process to find a way to permit easterners, particularly the old elite, to deal with their own history. If the PDS is a regional party, it also represents the "really existing" experience of the former GDR, a beleaguered and outmoded industrial society swallowed up by the powerful German economy: distrust of the market, belief in the beneficial effects of a powerful benevolent state, and suspicion of democracy. Perhaps even more important, as Reich concedes, the PDS provides "spiritual and emotional ties."

For all these reasons, the fierce debate over whether to cooperate with the PDS has intensified among Social Democrats. Those who reject cooperation emphasize that the party is a "veterans' association of the old SED," and that its members consistently mask their own compromised pasts with resentment against the West. But many eastern Social Democrats, who believe that as a manifestation of the historical failures of unification the PDS is likely to last, stop short of such absolutes. They look toward long-term integration of PDS voters rather than permanent confrontation. The PDS leadership, too, has unsuccessfully tried to limit the influence of the hardliners. On January 15 fifty thousand PDS supporters marched to the graves of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht on the anniversary of their 1919 murder, reviving an antiquated GDR ritual. At the party's congress in late January the so-called "Communist Platform," a coalition of younger Stalinists and old-timers, denounced PDS chairman Lothar Bisky for promoting "social democratization." Resolutions strained with contradictory claims. For

example, a plank declaring “anticommunist attitudes” incompatible with party membership was replaced with one declaring them legitimate among persons who had suffered under communism, but which rejected “criminal, reactionary, and rightist” anticommunism.

Ironically, just two years ago there was much euphoria about creating a new “metropolitan”

Germany by moving the capital to Berlin away from provincial Bonn. Now the prospect of relocating the government has been dampened by the power of a provincial party in Germany’s center. At least for the time being, Clara Zetkin Strasse still leads to the new Reichstag. □

Román de la Campa

CUBA AND ITS EXILES

Cuban affairs drew many headlines in 1994. Spring marked the beginning of a headlong cascade of events: a bungled attempt by the Havana regime to stage a dialogue with moderate exiles in April, a mass exodus of Cuban *balseros* (rafters) to U.S. shores in July and August, subsequent bilateral meetings with the United States throughout early fall, a November solidarity gathering in Cuba with what remains of the Latin American left, a non-invitation to Miami’s Summit of the Americas in early December, the Vatican’s appointment of a new Cuban cardinal in mid-December, an ongoing debate over the encampment of nearly thirty thousand Cubans in Guantanamo, rioting by Cubans in Panama, more bilateral meetings to discuss immigration and perhaps the economic blockade scheduled for early 1995, and so forth.

The list goes on, but the impasse remains. Still no opening in sight for bridging the thirty-six-year-old rift between Cuba and Washington. Or is it between Cuba and Miami? Cuba remains trapped in a series of historical binds: the lingering cult of a revolutionary leader turned omnipotent dictator, a controlled economy suddenly submitted to the law of neoliberal markets, the remnants of a cold war with the United States, and most important, a

long-distance civil war with a transplanted ruling class in Miami still thirsting for revenge. Castro and Más Canosa (head of the Cuban-American Foundation) are both opposed to constructive negotiations among Cubans. One is now aiming to extract yet more sacrifices from three generations of self-denying revolutionaries facing economic collapse. The other seeks to fuel the pretense that there was no need for a revolution in the first place. Meanwhile, Cuba has become the only country left in the Western hemisphere whose families are kept apart for strictly political reasons.

Most Americans believe the time has come to end the decades-long U.S. blockade on Cuba’s economy. Even the *Wall Street Journal* and the late Richard Nixon dismissed its value. The growing consensus is that capitalism will undo the revolution sooner than any other measure. Besides, Americans are not accustomed to having restrictions placed on where they travel or invest, particularly after the collapse of the Soviet empire. Prolonging a feud with Castro also seems pointless after the demise of the socialist economy, unless one is bent on punishing Cubans who don’t take to the seas. And if trading with China is acceptable, why not deal with Cuba? Does anyone really believe China has more respect for human rights than

Cuba? A 1994 UN vote on the blockade left the United States practically alone against the world.

But such conventional wisdom fails to take into account the influential Cuban-American community—its stakes in the Cuba question, its importance in contemporary American politics, and its fears that Castro will retain or even strengthen his hold on power. One can't simply apply the cold, broad strokes of geopolitical calculation where there is an internal community capable of claiming a role in policy formation. Our Cuba policy is inextricably bound to the influence of Miami's Cuban community—a sort of exile nation within the United States built with the conviction that it holds a special position in contemporary American history. No other group of immigrants commands a measure like the "Cuban Adjustment Act of 1965," the U.S. law guaranteeing immediate residency and expedited citizenship to all Cubans who reach American territories.

Over the last thirty-six years, Miami has absorbed three distinct migration waves from Cuba. First came the "historical exile" of the early sixties, then the Mariel boatlift of 1980, and finally the recent exodus of "raft-people." But class, racial, and ideological differences have been masked by the wealth and power of the first group, some 200,000 upper- and middle-class professionals, many of them first-generation Cubans of Spanish ancestry who were politically and economically displaced (and in some cases victimized) by the revolution. Upon arrival, they received immediate political asylum and considerable financial assistance from the U.S. government. Within a few decades, they transformed Miami from a provincial tourist town into a thriving Latin capital. Cuban immigrants from subsequent waves, such as those waiting in Guantanamo, have long known they can find immediate work and credit in this Spanish-speaking enclave of U.S. capitalism.

Consider the historical role played by the exile Cuban nation in U.S. politics. In the early sixties it galvanized America's fears of a spreading revolution led by Che, Fidel, Al-lende, Bishop, and ultimately Sandino. True

enough, neither Kennedy nor subsequent presidents delivered the much-awaited successful invasion of Cuba on their behalf. But Cuban exiles were given a free hand to fashion Miami after their most cherished memories of pre-revolutionary Havana. By and large, Miami's Cubans and U.S. elites have created a community of mutual interests.

Now, however, all bets are off. Cubans in Guantanamo find themselves in a new era that features Proposition 187 and a U.S. commitment to legal immigration from Cuba. In this uncharted post-contra period of GATT and NAFTA, both Miami and Cuba must revise their scripts in response to shifting U.S. interests. Accordingly, Castro is moving toward the Chinese model of external market relations with internal political controls, while Más Canosa is threatening all foreign governments who dare invest in Cuba. In a recent letter to various embassies, he warns that a future Cuban government will place all the assets of those who deal with Castro in a trust until the losses incurred by the first wave of Cuban exiles are paid off.

Is there room for Cubans from both sides to step beyond this huge ideological divide? Not easily. Castro remains the only voice of power in Cuba. In Miami, there are more than fifty organized political groups, most of them with leaders from the Batista period of Cuban politics. All agree in their opposition to Castro but disagree on who should take power when he is finally overthrown. Each has its own candidate for president. But Más Canosa's Cuban-American Foundation is the only exile organization powerful enough to have a lobby in Washington and an agenda for the exile nation.

Nonetheless, it is clear that a growing number of working-class Cubans from the last migration wave favor a less drastic policy toward Cuba. They are more affected by measures against traveling and sending money to Cuba than exiles from earlier waves. Moreover, their memories of Cuba are fresher and perhaps more realistic; they are also likely

to be less Americanized and have many more family members waiting for currency or a visa.

There have been two attempts to stage talks between the two Cubas—one in 1979, the other in 1994. Both were sponsored by Havana against Miami's opposition. In each instance Miami berated all participants and ridiculed the good will of independent exiles willing to talk. In Cuba these exiles also found their sentiments betrayed, as the sponsors exerted absolute control over the meetings. But perhaps the time has come for another try, this time under the auspices of a third party—say Mexico or Canada—with OAS (Organization of American States) supervision. A most likely convener for such a dialogue could be the new

Cuban cardinal, Jaime Ortega. His credentials are impeccable: neither Cuba nor Miami trusts him completely. The immediate agenda is clear: allow Cuban families to see and help each other across the political divide without limitations, release the 30,000 Cubans from Guantanamo and Panama so they can enter the United States, review or repeal the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1965 so Cuba does not blame another exodus on it, promote and monitor legal mechanisms for emigration from Cuba. Needless to say, much larger and trickier questions lie beyond these small steps. But they could be the beginning of a bridge over a thirty-six-year-old breach. □

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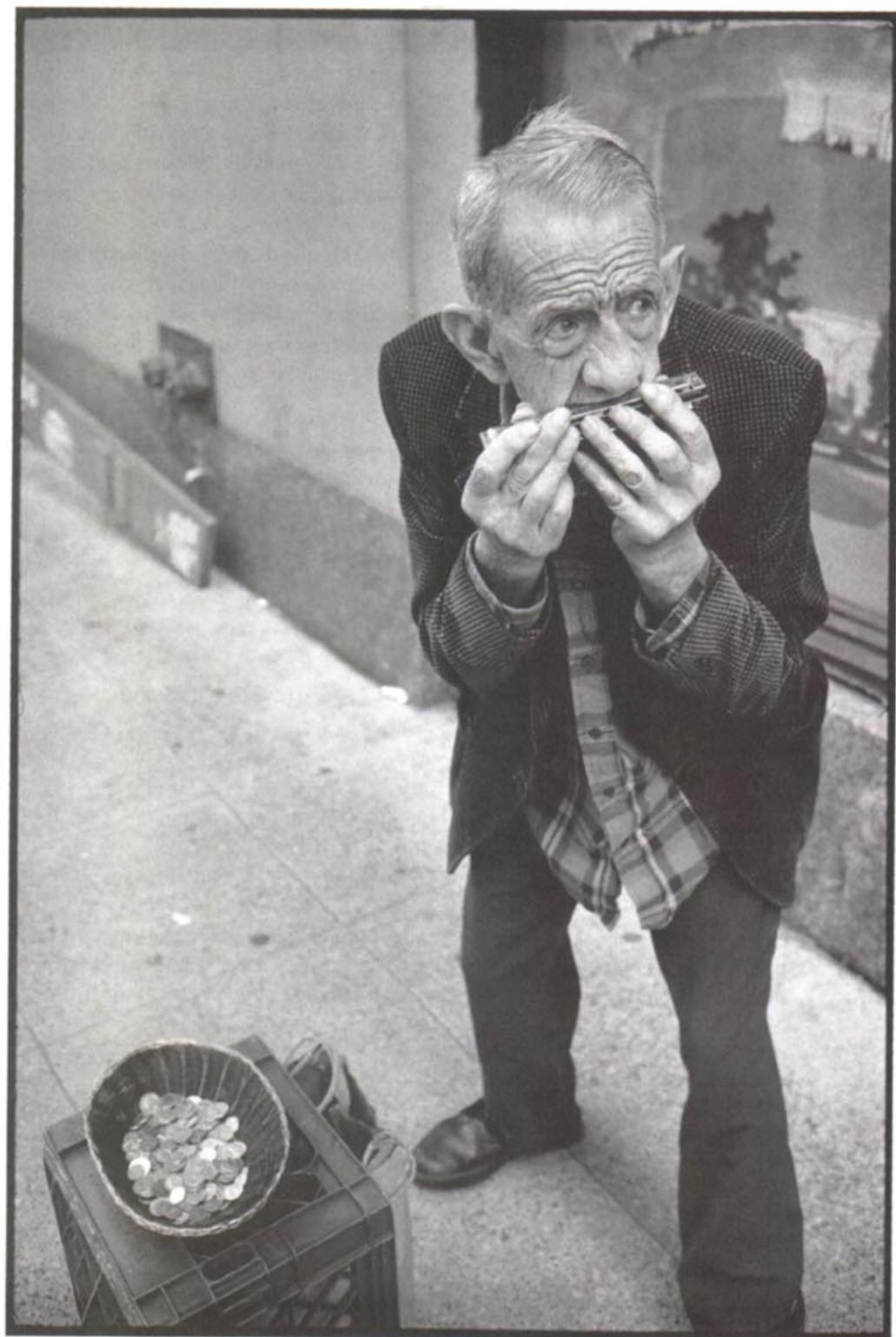
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IMPACT VISUALS/Christopher Smith

THE WAR AGAINST WELFARE

When candidate Bill Clinton pledged to “end welfare as we know it,” that statement essentially summed up the current state of poverty politics. In recent years, it has become politically advantageous to promise to end welfare. On the other hand, ending poverty, the *real* problem, has become an issue that most politicians prefer to avoid. There is more to this shift than mere rhetoric. Rather, the fact that the pledge to end welfare came from a Democratic presidential campaign is emblematic of a major political shift that has gone largely unremarked. Over time, the party of antipoverty warriors has evolved into a party of antiwelfare warriors. The Clinton pledge signaled a new stage in the “reinvention” of Democratic party politics, one that has profound implications, not only for the current Republican attack on welfare and other social programs, but, ultimately, for the nation’s capacity to address poverty.

Before getting caught up in the raging debates about welfare reform, it might be useful to step back and consider what has brought us to this point and where we are headed. Recall that only six years ago, congressional Democrats claimed victory in reforming welfare by passing the Family Support Act of 1988, an act signed by Ronald Reagan. What accounted for the rush to reform again so soon, even before the 1988 Act was fully evaluated? What happened to transform the war on poverty that once occupied lawmakers into the current war on welfare? What does this transformation suggest about the prospects for welfare initiatives today and, ultimately, for the nation’s capacity to address poverty?

In hopes of learning from history, I have

searched previous episodes of welfare reform for clues to understanding the almost normalized sense of “crisis” and accompanying impulse to reform that have become hallmarks of contemporary welfare politics. From this vantage point, it appears that recurrent waves of welfare reformism may be better understood as responses to electoral and tactical issues facing politicians than as responses to the needs of the poor—less useful in drawing attention to poverty than in provoking hostility toward the poor and the government programs that benefit them. The current campaign to “end welfare” is a consequence of past strategies that have backed Democratic reformers into a corner where ending welfare takes precedence over ending poverty. It is also part of a bidding war for the swing voters (mostly white, middle- and working-class) in national elections.

Now both Democratic and Republican reformers make the case that “ending welfare” constitutes a strategy for “ending poverty.” But history demonstrates that it does not. It shows, instead, that these are contradictory enterprises.

Legacy of the New Deal

Ironically, the transformation from antipoverty to antiwelfare politics is rooted, not only in contemporary electoral and economic conditions, but also in the historical legacy of the New Deal. The federal government’s response to the crisis of the Great Depression did not contemplate the provision of direct relief on a permanent basis. In fact, work relief programs were quickly reduced and then abolished once the worst of the crisis had passed and well before economic recovery was solidified.

However, two statutory provisions for direct cash assistance were made permanent. One, Social Security, eventually became the big success story of the New Deal reforms. It provided income support to elderly citizens based, to some extent, on their prior earnings from work. When benefits were later indexed to the cost of living, the economic well-being of the elderly was largely secured. Another provision of the Social Security Act of 1935 established Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), creating a mechanism for supporting state relief efforts and, over time, for influencing the terms on which poor families would be eligible for relief.

While the success of Social Security was determined by how many individuals it reached and how its benefits grew, political success for ADC (and later AFDC, Aid to Families with Dependent Children) was determined in exactly the opposite way. The program Franklin Roosevelt offered the nation was built on the assumption that economic recovery would make cash relief largely unnecessary. From this historical legacy, welfare came to acquire the dubious distinction of being the one national program deemed successful only if it disappeared.

Welfare did not disappear after the economy recovered and “normal” business cycles resumed, but neither did it grow very much. Initially, about one million children received benefits through ADC, a number that grew to only 1.4 million by the end of the 1940s. In 1950, with the full implementation of ADC by the states and the extension of benefits to adult caretakers of poor children, the number of recipients increased to slightly more than two million, a level that rose only modestly in the 1950s.

The Sixties

By the time the nation “rediscovered” poverty in the early sixties, AFDC served just over three million people and cost just over \$1 billion. Poverty had been declining fairly steadily since the thirties as the economy grew. However, a “residual” poverty rate of 17 percent and its concentration in declining

regions like Appalachia and in growing urban centers suggested it might not wither away after all.

Although the Kennedy administration’s motives for developing an antipoverty agenda may be debated, that agenda was at least consistent with the Democratic party’s electoral needs—to mobilize and incorporate minority and poor voters in key states that could provide the margin of victory in presidential elections. The national Democratic party also had an interest in sustaining the support of labor and big city political leaders. Responding to these interests, Kennedy administration officials initially had one big advantage over their counterparts today: they had a federal budget surplus that they could distribute across potentially opposed constituencies so that each could profit, to some extent, from the antipoverty effort.

Welfare policy constituted a relatively small part of the Kennedy administration’s “War on Poverty.” Kennedy’s Council of Economic Advisors (CEA) had argued that policy must attack structural causes of poverty, most important among them racial discrimination and the inability of the economy to produce jobs paying a living wage. However, the CEA also argued that breaking the “vicious circle” of poverty would require social services, such as education and training, to prepare poor adults to take advantage of the new opportunities that antipoverty policy presumably would open for them.

Like the New Dealers before them, antipoverty warriors assumed that the most important reform—the creation of new jobs—would occur through other means, among them tax cuts proposed by the Kennedy administration. This assumption justified a strategy based largely on the provision of social services. The tactical benefits of this approach were fully appreciated by sixties reformers. As Adam Yarmolinsky recalled from his experience in the Kennedy administration: “You ask yourself, do you concentrate on finding jobs for people or preparing people for jobs? There our tactical decision was let’s concentrate first on preparing people for jobs.” Among other things, “it was less expensive . . . than to create jobs for people.” Despite its somewhat

Machiavellian overtones, this approach could more or less be justified as “antipoverty,” if services supplemented, rather than substituted for, policies to reduce poverty through economic growth and, to an extent, through liberalized welfare eligibility.

Prefiguring the initial Clinton reform strategy, officials within the Kennedy administration sought to build a reform coalition around the notion that social services constituted both an antipoverty and an antiwelfare strategy. By reducing poverty, they would reduce welfare use as well. This strategy had obvious political advantages in building a legislative coalition for reform in a Congress divided across both partisan and liberal-conservative lines. Thus, the House Ways and Means Committee supported Kennedy’s welfare reform because it “places emphasis on the provision of services rather than depending on welfare checks. The bill would . . . provide incentives to recipients . . . to improve their condition *so as to render continued public assistance . . . unnecessary*” (emphasis added). The “services amendments” to AFDC, enacted in 1962, provided federal support to states for job training and intensive casework with welfare recipients and extended welfare eligibility to two-parent families. However, the short-term advantages of this strategy obscured its long-term costs. Facing a divided Congress, it seemed politically advantageous to employ antiwelfare rhetoric to achieve antipoverty objectives. But, by framing new services as a solution, not only to poverty, but also to rising welfare caseloads, Democratic reformers began transforming the problem of ending poverty into a problem of ending welfare.

There were two big catches to the Democrats’ strategy. First, as many reformers understood, services did not themselves increase the supply of good jobs or eliminate structural barriers to employment, such as racial or gender discrimination. Second, promising services is not the same as delivering them. In practice, states did not provide much in the way of new or worthwhile services to welfare recipients. Rather, they used the new

federal money to hire scores of unskilled caseworkers, not the professional social workers envisioned in the bill. By “meeting the numbers” for increasing “service provision,” states were able to use the welfare amendments to capture new federal dollars to supplement tight state budgets. By the time Congress turned off the spigot in 1967, it was unclear what in the way of real services had been provided. Consequently, little was known about whether quality services of specific types might help poor adults prepare for jobs or how much these services could contribute to the economic prospects of welfare recipients under specific labor market conditions.

The strategy of promising that antipoverty services would pay off in reducing welfare use backfired. When welfare rolls began to climb, both the services strategy and its apparent beneficiaries, the poor, were discredited. Congress responded, not only by cutting funding but also by instituting new work requirements as a condition for welfare receipt.

Into The Seventies

Looking back at the early sixties, one is struck by the unusual opportunity for real antipoverty initiatives created by relatively stable welfare caseloads and federal budget surpluses. That context had changed dramatically by the seventies. An “explosion” in welfare caseloads hit the nation at the same time that Vietnam War-related spending sent inflation into overdrive. It is hardly surprising that, in those circumstances, the objective of reducing welfare costs would displace the objective of reducing poverty. With Richard Nixon’s election in 1968, one might have expected Republicans to take the opportunity to pursue decidedly antiwelfare reforms.

Remarkably, Nixon’s initiative, the Family Assistance Plan (FAP), presented a program of patently radical reform that had strong linkages to the sixties antipoverty perspective. Its most notable feature, a guaranteed minimum income, reflected dissatisfaction with service-based approaches to poverty and the ascendance of the idea of a negative income tax. Economist Milton Friedman, in *Capitalism and*

Freedom, advocated a negative income tax as a response to poverty that would not interfere with market functioning. That idea clearly influenced the Heineman Commission on Income Maintenance Programs, which in 1969 recommended a minimum income guarantee as preferable to a work- or services-based strategy. In plain language rarely heard from an official body, the commission asserted: "The poor inhabit a different world than the non-poor, *primarily because they lack money*" (emphasis added). In providing a minimum income guarantee, the Nixon plan implicitly acknowledged that fact. The plan also acknowledged the administration's need to accommodate antipoverty Democrats as a condition for reform.

Some analysts have professed amazement that the Nixon administration actually wanted to enact the dream of antipoverty warriors to secure a right to a minimum income. However, the administration was less concerned about rights and more concerned about budgets. Federal welfare costs were rising and, to many, seemed out of control. FAP was a vehicle for responding to budget pressures by controlling welfare costs.

In a masterful piece of policy strategy, the administration, mindful of the power of antipoverty Democrats in Congress, offered them a policy granting a guaranteed minimum income. But it also guaranteed that the extent of the "entitlement" would be subject to the legislative process. In other words, it was willing to concede the symbol of a guaranteed income so long as it could control how much there would be to pass around. The original proposal sweetened the deal by capping spending at a level that would initially reduce no welfare payments and would actually raise them for poor families living in eight Southern states providing extremely low benefits. However, once spending was capped, the administration would be in a position to hold the expenditures in check and push benefit levels down.

If ever a president had proposed a plan to "end welfare as we know it," Nixon did.

However, despite its strategic cleverness, efforts to build a legislative coalition collapsed as liberal Democrats and welfare rights organizations fought low benefit levels and workfare requirements, while Southern conservatives attacked provisions that would increase benefits in their states. As Senator Russell Long of Louisiana worried aloud, FAP's income guarantee would undoubtedly make it more difficult for him to find a maid to iron his shirts.

FAP was neither an archetypal antipoverty initiative nor was it clearly an antiwelfare plan. Rather, it constituted an attempt to forge a compromise between these two opposed interests, producing bitter fights that ended with the plan's defeat. Those hard-fought battles demonstrated that antipoverty Democrats were still a force to be reckoned with. But, in retrospect, it also revealed a critical weakness in their position. Although Democratic reformers were prepared to fight for more generous benefits for the poor, they also were prepared to concede that increased welfare use—regardless of its causes—constituted a serious public problem.

FAP's defeat left in its wake a profound sense of crisis: welfare was "out of control" and must be contained. Liberal Democrats who had previously promoted reforms as a means to reduce welfare rolls found themselves largely without arguments to counter those who claimed to have the same end in mind. In this context, antiwelfare reformers were able to move ahead with two strategies to restrict welfare's growth. By keeping these strategies modest and indirect, they could advance restrictions on welfare provision without provoking intense opposition.

One strategy involved the extension of work requirements imposed as a condition for receiving welfare. Promoted by one of the Senate's staunchest, antiwelfare Southern Democrats, the "Talmadge Amendments" expanded the WIN (Work Incentive) program first established in 1967 after the "failure" of the services strategy. The 1972 amendments required women to register for work or training once their youngest child reached the age of six.

The second strategy was constructed around the administrative reform of welfare. In order

to “clean up the welfare mess,” the administration inaugurated “quality control” reviews of welfare payments and threatened to impose fiscal penalties against states with unacceptable levels of payment errors. By measuring and penalizing only excess payments, but ignoring underpayments and failure to pay eligible families, quality control encouraged states to adopt an array of administrative practices that restricted access to welfare. In contrast to high visibility legislative reforms, administrative reforms indirectly and incrementally reduced the ability of poor families to claim welfare.

Welfare reform pressures temporarily subsided, while administrative reforms proceeded apace. Among other things, these reforms also sped up and legitimated the conversion of state welfare bureaucracies into nonprofessional, administrative entities. With social services and social work largely removed from welfare, the clerical orientation of welfare agencies seemed justified and, certainly, less expensive. Ironically, the transformation of welfare agencies from social service providers into claims processing bureaus—a transformation that seemed sensible in the late seventies and early eighties—later left state welfare agencies unprepared to implement the extensive work-related services mandated by the Family Support Act of 1988.

The seventies marked a transitional period in the politics of welfare reform. While antiwelfare sentiments grew more prominent, they did not fully displace antipoverty interests. The inability of either set of interests to dominate derailed the Carter administration reform initiatives in the late seventies, just as it had previously stalemated Nixon’s reform program.

Recalling his campaign promise to reduce the “misery index” and buoyed by a substantial Democratic congressional majority, Jimmy Carter took on welfare reform early in his administration. In a hint of things to come, he argued that the welfare system “should be scrapped and a totally new system implemented.” The administration’s alternative, proposed in August 1977, was the Program for Better Jobs and Income (PBJI). PBJI proposed

to replace AFDC, SSI (Supplemental Security Income), and food stamps with one umbrella program. Drawing from an array of antipoverty and antiwelfare proposals, PBJI packaged together a negative income tax, work mandates, employment services, earned income tax credits and government provided jobs—all within a limited budget.

The complexity of this plan reflected the political complexity of accommodating antipoverty and antiwelfare interests within one reform package. Yet, complexity could not mask the fundamental division between liberals who doubted that the income floor was high enough and conservatives who feared that benefits would create work disincentives. After endless debates about “floors” and “notches,” the plan failed to satisfy almost anyone.

The Eighties

The bold Reagan agenda of cutting government’s social welfare role was presaged by a spate of popular literature that starkly blamed government programs for creating persistent poverty and the so-called underclass. Welfare *was* the problem, according to pundits such as George Gilder and Charles Murray. Using a combination of colorful anecdotes, speculation, and “creative” statistics, they painted a vivid—but false—portrait in which rising welfare benefits seemed to create and intensify social pathologies. They fully excused economic policy, discrimination, and declining social assistance from any responsibility for persistent and worsening poverty.*

The administration’s major welfare policy victory occurred in the earliest years of the Reagan presidency and without sparking a focused legislative debate. Under the rubric of

* In a particularly egregious misuse of statistics, Charles Murray claimed that poverty among the nonelderly had increased as social welfare spending had increased. However, he included in that calculation spending on social security, which dwarfs spending for means-tested programs that serve poor families. In fact, between 1970 and 1993, AFDC benefit levels declined by 45 percent, dropping by 27 percent during the period between 1980 and 1993 alone. The combined value of benefits from means-tested programs declined by 26.2 percent from 1979 to 1992.

budgetary reform, the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981 (OBRA) enacted the most sweeping cuts in welfare provision in two decades. OBRA limited AFDC eligibility to the desperately poor—that is, to families with gross incomes no greater than 150 percent of state need standards (which more than half of the states set at a level lower than the poverty threshold).

OBRA also reduced support for the working poor by lowering work-related deductions and work incentive provisions. Those changes effectively took workers out of welfare and left them to face the increased hardship associated with low-wage work. As the General Accounting Office later reported, OBRA reduced welfare rolls by 493,000 families, initially saving the federal government \$93 million per month, largely by increasing poverty, hunger, and health risks for low-income families. Paradoxically, cutting families with workers out of welfare hurt not only them, but also the families who remained. All were poor. But critics could more easily brand those receiving welfare as “nonworkers” and, in a dizzying leap of causal analysis, blame welfare for fostering their “dependency” and “causing” poverty. In this sense, OBRA helped lay the groundwork for the intensifying antiwelfare campaign to come.

However, immediately following OBRA, welfare reform pressures briefly dissipated, as national attention turned toward other issues. If welfare had not withered away, its prior growth had certainly been stopped in its tracks. OBRA was subsequently amended, easing somewhat the restrictions placed on welfare eligibility. Yet, by the end of the decade, welfare caseloads had not returned to their pre-1982 levels.

In the aftermath of reforms that reduced and restricted welfare, poverty increased and expanded. In fact, welfare policy made a relatively small contribution to these developments. More significant were tax changes that redistributed income from the poor and middle-class to the most affluent, economic recession that reduced the capacity of the economy to provide enough jobs for those who badly wanted them, and economic restructuring that

cut the number of stable jobs with good wages. Welfare policy exacerbated the hardships created by these shifts, limiting access to the most destitute, and then providing benefits insufficient to raise them even to the poverty line. In 1987, the median state welfare benefit for a parent with two children totalled \$4,248 per year, a figure 64 percent below the poverty line. When combined with food stamps, median benefits fell short of the poverty line by about 25 percent.

Rising poverty coincided with the return of Democratic majorities in Congress and demands from governors for relief from state budgetary pressures. The cost of welfare was one of those pressures. When Reagan mentioned welfare in his 1986 State of the Union Address, a loose coalition of congressional Democrats, governors, and social service advocates that had been working to craft a welfare reform initiative were ready to jump in with their proposal. Their program coupled elements of the old Democratic services strategy with new requirements that women with young children work or prepare for work as a demonstration of personal “responsibility.”

The essentials of that proposal were developed through the work of the National Governors Association (NGA) task force on welfare reform, headed by then-Governor Bill Clinton of Arkansas. In presenting its proposal, the NGA stated: “The principal responsibility of government in the welfare contract is to provide education, job training, and/or job placement services to all employable recipients. These services must be carefully structured so they suit the employment needs of individual participants.” The elements of the governors’ plan became the basis for congressional efforts to develop the Family Support Act of 1988. As in 1962, Democratic reformers promised that their strategy would save money by decreasing welfare use. They also proposed that those savings be used to satisfy the traditional antipoverty side of the agenda, that is, to increase and equalize benefit levels. At one point, the House bill included an enhanced

federal match to encourage state benefit increases.

Although the administration had no serious reform program of its own, Reagan did assert one caveat. He sent word from the White House that welfare reform must include some version of his favored workfare program or he would veto the entire package. By workfare, I refer to a specific policy that requires welfare recipients to work off their benefits at or below minimum wage. Often, the same term is loosely used to include all types of work-related policies, including those involving education and training services. This ambiguity is not without its political advantages, enabling an apparent consensus to form around "workfare," while sidestepping fundamental differences between workfare as a punishment and workfare as a social service.

If Democratic majorities in Congress had previously been able to constrain the antiwelfare efforts of Republicans in the White House, this time the Republican president was able to constrain the antipoverty efforts of congressional Democrats. In the process of legislative logrolling, Democrats reluctantly conceded workfare as the quid pro quo necessary to attain funds for their favored program of job-related services.

Passage of the Family Support Act was hailed as a great victory by Democratic reformers, the first comprehensive legislative reform since the 1960s. Much like the 1962 amendments, reform was predicated on the notion that a services strategy is an antipoverty strategy. However, the price paid for that strategy in 1988 was high. In return for limited funding for services, liberal Democrats conceded any prospect of restoring the value of eroded benefits. The final bill totaled \$3.5 billion over five years and formulated services funding as a "capped entitlement." If states were able to meet all the conditions required to receive their full share of federal funds, that would only provide them with an estimated \$800 to \$1,400 per participant for services. In addition, the measure incorporated workfare and other mandatory participation provisions that satisfied the antiwelfare interests of lawmakers in both parties. With passage of this

Act, Democratic reformers moved a step further along the road from antipoverty to antiwelfare policy-making.

Reform Redux

The Family Support Act was enacted with much fanfare and predictable claims that work-based services would reduce welfare use. They did not. On the contrary, the number of recipients began to climb, rising from 10.7 million in 1989 to 11.2 million in 1990, 12.4 million in 1991, and 13.4 million in 1992. The fact that welfare caseloads rose less rapidly than family poverty might have been taken to suggest that welfare reform had failed because poverty increased. Instead, reform was said to have failed because caseloads were rising.*

Unfortunately, like the "old" Democrats of the sixties, contemporary reformers had painted themselves into a corner by promising that their reforms would "save" tax dollars by reducing welfare use. They then had the singular misfortune to implement the Family Support Act in the midst of a recession marked by widespread job losses and state cutbacks in funding for the Act's job-related services. With rising welfare caseloads came a resurgence of antiwelfare politics. But this time, not only Republicans, but mainstream Democrats were part of it.

If, as we are reminded, the Clinton campaign was about "the economy, stupid," where did the new impetus for welfare reform come from and why was it framed as antiwelfare rather than antipoverty? A partial answer is that caseloads grew as the economy declined. Democrats had long before conceded that growing caseloads, regardless of the reasons for them, indicated trouble. However, the campaign's decidedly antiwelfare approach to poverty was also the product of the electoral logic guiding the Clinton campaign's efforts to build a "new Democratic" coalition.

* In the midst of a deepening recession and labor market restructuring, one might have asked why more families were not being saved from poverty by welfare. The effectiveness of means-tested programs in raising families out of poverty dropped by 29 percent between 1979 and 1991.

Put briefly, the campaign sought to rebuild a Democratic constituency by repairing relations with disaffected former Democrats and luring away Republican voters disenchanted with the state of the economy and the Republican candidate. In part because of its ambiguity, the “end welfare” pledge offered symbolic evidence to conservatives that Clinton was not a traditional liberal Democrat while proffering services-based reforms to reassure liberal supporters that he would not abandon the poor. In an effort to redeem its “end welfare” pledge, the administration’s initial reform plan combined expanded job-related services and earned income tax credits (EITC) with a two-year time limit on welfare receipt, followed by Reagan-style workfare (assigned public-sector jobs in which poor adults work for welfare benefits). In introducing his reform proposal, Clinton stressed: “This is not a conservative or a liberal idea. It’s both. It’s different.” However, the history of welfare reform suggests that, at least tactically, this plan was not so different. In bringing together antipoverty and antiwelfare elements, it was reminiscent of prior reform plans.

On the other hand, there *was* something different about the Clinton reform plan. Unlike previous Democratic initiatives, it omitted any income guarantees or increases in welfare benefits, but included welfare cuts-by-time-limit and expanded workfare. In effect, the Clinton plan promised to end welfare *first* and end poverty *later*. This proposal indicated that a dangerous new stage had been reached in the transformation of the Democratic agenda from one of fighting poverty to one of fighting welfare.

Although the Clinton administration did not *create* public hostility toward welfare, it did seek to capture political advantage from it by appealing to antiwelfare sentiment as a means of luring disgruntled working- and middle-class voters into the “new Democratic” coalition. In moving the party from its erstwhile position as protector of the poor to one ready to be “tough” on the poor, the administration helped lower political barriers to the ascendance of a much tougher “new Republican” coalition. The Republican majority swept into Congress

last fall could be tougher because it was largely unfettered by labor, urban, and minority interests. It wasted no time in writing the poor *out* of its “contract” with the rest of America.

The Republicans seized their opportunity to overtake the administration’s pledge to end welfare. They selectively adopted antiwelfare elements of the Clinton plan and pushed them to new lengths, unimaginable to the Democratic reformers who first proposed them. They proposed to “end welfare” by the simple expedient of eliminating income support as an entitlement and excluding any assistance for categories of poor families classified by marital status, immigration status, and the duration or recurrence of need. The Clinton administration and its allies have found themselves in the awkward position of criticizing Republican welfare reforms as “mean-spirited,” while defending their own initiatives—initiatives that first launched and legitimated time limits, family caps, and state discretion to reduce or eliminate benefits to entire categories of the poor.

Apparently, all the fuss over welfare by Democrats and Republicans has convinced much of the public that welfare constitutes a fearsome national problem. A recent poll by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard School of Public Health found that 40 percent of the public believes welfare is one of the two largest areas of federal spending, larger even than defense or Social Security. One could hardly be expected to imagine from all the brouhaha over welfare that, at \$16 billion, it constitutes a scant 1 percent of federal spending (compared to about \$300 billion each for Social Security and defense).

In the midst of all the uproar, it would be difficult to overstate the political dilemma confronting Democrats, inside and outside the administration, who want to find ways to address poverty. In the current electoral and budgetary context, even more than in the past, it may seem tactically necessary to placate antiwelfare sentiment by, as the administration proposed, packaging time limits and workfare with useful antipoverty initiatives, among them the provision of job-related services and the EITC. But, at this point, it is far from evident

that antiwelfare Republicans can be placated. On the other hand, it is clear that if antipoverty Democrats are going to find a way out of the corner into which they have painted themselves, they need to recognize that it is not possible to build a program to fight poverty on the back of a program to fight welfare. They must find a way to put poverty first. But it won't be easy.

Putting Poverty First

When Franklin D. Roosevelt launched the United States on the path toward a social welfare state, he also placed a major obstacle on that path. The promise that welfare would largely wither away as the economy recovered was no more sustainable then than it is now. The reasons for poverty are complex and varied, deeply rooted in structural features of the economy and society.

Yet, there is a persistent urge for a quick fix, an urge that is hardly unique to this issue or this time. As the history of reform demonstrates, a quick fix is easy to promise, but tough to deliver. When reforms fail to accomplish what they promise, the reaction may create an environment that pushes future reforms even farther off target. In the heyday of antipoverty policy-making, Democratic reformers promoted their program with the unrealistic promise that services would, on their own, reduce welfare. When that promise proved false, both government and the poor were blamed. Antipoverty Democrats increasingly found themselves trapped by their own strategy—a strategy that depicted welfare as the critical national problem, *more* critical, it seemed, than the problem of poverty.

However, despite the best intentions of past Democratic reformers, the budgetary and political “benefits” of attacking welfare (if they existed at all) were not readily transferable to efforts to attack poverty. They led, instead, to liberal reforms that did not address the structural sources of poverty, reducing neither welfare nor poverty to any substantial degree. These reforms fueled a political backlash against welfare and widened the divide between those who have and those who don't.

Public anger and frustration at programs that don't work and politicians who don't deliver are the stuff of which the Perot phenomenon and the 1994 Republican sweep were made.

It is time to abandon a failed strategy that pretends that welfare, alone, can solve the problem of poverty. Welfare is not an effective instrument for managing the economy. It can neither create private-sector jobs nor assure that they provide health benefits and a living wage. These are problems that, although central to the problem of poverty, lie outside of welfare's boundaries.

Welfare is not effective as an instrument for social engineering. Decades of careful research show that welfare is largely irrelevant to the personal life choices made by poor adults about childbearing, marriage, and living arrangements. It has only a modest relationship to choices about work, which are more strongly related to the availability of good jobs, the ability to get them, and, for women, to the availability of good day care. Welfare does not create “dependent” personalities, nor do most families depend on welfare for more than a few years at a time. Eliminating welfare does not magically create “independence,” if by that we mean the ability to make it in the labor market. It does create hardship. Studies show that cuts in welfare are associated with increases in poverty and declines in educational progress, health, and the ability of families to stay housed and stay together.

Welfare is reasonably effective as an instrument for relieving the destitution of needy families. Although the average AFDC grant for a family of three is only \$366 a month, when added to food and housing assistance, it raises above the poverty line about half of the families with children who would otherwise be even poorer. For the great majority of families who turn to welfare for help, it provides a temporary lifeline to pull them through bad times. For a small fraction of families, those bad times are longer lasting and require additional types of help. Proposals to eliminate welfare for categories of the poor, place arbitrary time limits on its use, and penalize personal life choices concerning marriage and childbearing move in exactly the wrong

direction. They will reduce welfare's effectiveness in the one area in which it has demonstrated some success—mitigating poverty's worst effects.

If Democrats want to put poverty first, it will mean fighting for programs that address poverty at its roots, in the decline in jobs that provide health benefits and a living wage, the movement of jobs to suburbs out of reach to inner-city residents, and the failure of urban schools to educate. Relieving poverty's harmful effects on children and families will mean continuing, even improving, income support for those living at the margins of the economy and society. There are plenty of good ideas about how to tackle these problems, ideas spanning issues of national health care, community investment, housing allowances, school reform, and the EITC. Unfortunately, these may seem unattractive to politicians desperate for a quick fix and cost-free solutions. On the other hand, neither the Republican program of radical welfare cuts nor the administration program of smaller cuts and modest services

will make things better. More likely, they will make things worse.

This scenario is fraught with political dangers, especially for Democrats. As should be obvious by now, policies that promise much but don't deliver intensify disillusionment with government and politicians. This disillusionment fuels a Republican politics of reaction and resentment that undermines the electoral prospects of Democrats across the nation, as the 1994 election so starkly demonstrated. It also undermines support for antipoverty programs that *can* work, both to relieve immediate distress and to secure the nation's economic and social future. If that disillusionment is to be avoided, Democratic leaders must break out of the corner into which they have painted themselves by pretending that fighting welfare is the same as fighting poverty. They must find the courage to ask the right questions, not the expedient ones. The question is not how to end welfare, but how to end poverty. Between the two lies a world of difference. □

The 100 Day Revolution

This continued, unremitted effort of the members of your Assembly I take to be one among the causes of the mischief they have done. They who always labor can have no true judgment. You never give yourselves time to cool. You can never survey, from its proper point of sight, the work you have finished, before you decree its final execution. You can never plan the future by the past. You never go into the country, soberly and dispassionately to observe the effect of your measures on their objects. You cannot feel distinctly how far the people are rendered better and improved, or more miserable and depraved, by what you have done. You cannot see with your own eyes the sufferings and afflictions you cause. You know them but at a distance, on the statements of those who always flatter the reigning power, and who, amidst their representations and grievances, inflame your minds against those who are oppressed. These are amongst the effects of unremitted labor, when men exhaust their attention, burn out their candles, and are left in the dark.

—EDMUND BURKE, *A Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*

RACIAL POLITICS AND THE CLINTON-GUINIER EPISODE

Q. Mr. President, could you just give us an idea of what part of her writings you really have trouble with?

A. Yes, I can give you an idea. In the Michigan Law Review, there was an article, Lani analyzed the weaknesses of the present remedies available under the Voting Rights Act, and many of her analyses I agree with, but seem to be arguing for principles of proportional representation and minority veto as general remedies that I think inappropriate as general remedies and anti-democratic, very difficult to defend.¹

In 1993 Bill Clinton nominated Lani Guinier, a law professor at the University of Pennsylvania, to head the Civil Rights division of the Justice Department. Guinier was experienced in civil rights litigation and politics and was also a family friend. Her nomination was attacked. She was charged with favoring quotas and racial polarization, and Clinton withdrew the nomination before the Senate debate. This story merits reexamining because the tensions that propelled it play such a large role in American politics. It is as much a story about Clinton and the shape of racial politics as about Guinier.

Unsurprisingly, Guinier's positions were deemed unacceptable by almost all Republican political figures who commented.² Somewhat more surprising, and far more important politically, were the vehement critiques of Guinier by center-right and centrist Democrats. The *New Republic* opposed her nomination in an article by Abigail Thernstrom and an editorial.³ Their arguments went as follows.

Guinier is smart and competent, but she would be a disastrous political appointment. Her emphasis on racial inequalities in political representation is legitimate, if overstated. But her proposals would increase the salience of race and sharpen racial cleavages. She would impose racial criteria on procedures—for districting and candidate selection—that should be race-neutral. Her commitment to shape procedures so as to achieve substantive political results makes her proposals effectively anti-democratic. Clinton should withdraw her nomination, on principled grounds and because it would hurt him politically. He did.

Clinton made clear from the start that he was appointing not only a respected civil rights lawyer and scholar but a friend. He also took responsibility for withdrawing the nomination, after reading several of Guinier's articles. Clinton portrayed himself not as a victim of Republican pressures but as a serious and disappointed reader of his nominee's work. His role is often downplayed or absent in commentaries on this episode, such as Stephen Carter's introduction to Guinier's book, *The Tyranny of the Majority*.⁴

Clinton judged Guinier's positions to be undemocratic, using terms similar to those of *TNR*. Although he is not only entitled to his views on these matters but obligated to have views, the process was embarrassing. Clinton claimed, after all, that he was nominating a long-time friend. She was not just the most confirmable among dozens of plausible nominees. He then acknowledged being unfamiliar with her ideas. Maybe he was lying—he had

read her work and hoped she would get through without a stir, but given mounting resistance he decided that feigning ignorance would be the best way to back off.

Let's presume he was telling the truth. If Clinton were Reagan or even Bush, his not having read a key nominee's writings would get little attention. Neither was expected to read. But Clinton reads widely, and Hillary Rodham Clinton reads most of what he reads plus everything else. Yet neither had read the work of someone they regarded as a friend and colleague for many years, even though her work concerns major issues that have frequently engaged both of them. Thus one reason the episode was so awkward was that it brightly illustrated a criticism black intellectuals and professionals make of their white colleagues—that with regard to the actual work and ideas of the former, the latter are condescending and uninterested rather than engaged and seriously critical.

If Clinton were privately more positive about Guinier's work than he said, he would have had good political reasons for acting as he did. The table below points to those reasons. It divides current American politics with two axes. One is the conventional left-right axis on social and economic policy. The other is about racial politics, where the main choices are

narrow legal equality (the Reagan-Bush position); full legal equality plus support for measures aiming at more equal opportunities; and full legal equality, strong efforts at equal opportunity, plus redistributive efforts across racial lines. I have given each cell a name corresponding to a real political current (thus cells 3 and 7 are vacant).

This figure suggests that dropping Guinier was an easy choice for Clinton when the hostility of *TNR* and neoconservative Democrats (cells 4 and 5) crystallized. Their opposition threatened to divide his tenuous electoral coalition. A course that promised an intra-Democratic war over racial policies could hardly appeal to Clinton in 1993, as he labored to present himself as a new Democrat. Thus the key to his decision was the opposition of *TNR* and Thernstrom, and the forces with which they were identified. Republican opposition by itself would have been of modest concern or perhaps even attractive. Imagine a different alignment, with Guinier's opposition coming from the far right and center-right Republicans (cells 1 and 2) along with a handful of conservative Democrats. Clinton would have seen that as a fight he would surely win, one that might even help him.

During and after this episode, one argument used by Guinier and her advocates was that her nomination was desirable because she would

Racial Politics				
Economic and Social Policy		Narrow Legal Equality	Legal Equality and Equality of Opportunity	Equality of Opportunity and Redistribution
		Reaganism	Republican Right [1]	Center Republicans [2]
				[3]
		Democratic Neoliberalism	Democratic Center-right [4]	Clinton and Gore [5]
				Chicano and Asian-American groups [6]
		Democratic Welfare Statism		AFL-CIO [8]
			[7]	Black Caucus and NOW [9]

Two Axes of Political Conflict in the 1990s

insist on straightforward discussion about race. To support Guinier was to favor a necessary if difficult national conversation. This argument didn't get anywhere, partly because it was strategically naive. Though he would prefer to put it in terms of transcending old debates, Clinton is not interested in encouraging talk about racial politics, because he thinks such talk will be divisive in ways that predictably hurt Democratic prospects. The irony of the Guinier nomination process was how quickly it seemed to confirm this view. Here was an evidently competent and well-intentioned nominee who wanted everyone to join her in talking frankly about racial politics. And her very presence on the political scene was doing nothing but causing Clinton trouble by spurring Democratic factionalism and opening his fragile coalition to Republican inroads. Talk about race? Clinton could fill pages with topics he would rather move to the top of the public agenda.

Clinton's anxiety about sustaining his coalition is only part of the story. He was practicing one of the trickier parts of a policy on racial matters that has been pushed by Democratic centrists and in a different form by some social democrats. In this view the road to racial equity requires depolarization. This will be encouraged by winning universalist measures such as health care reform. These measures will benefit blacks more than race-specific efforts, and will also build interracial ties useful in shaping a less divided politics. This policy implies avoiding people committed to talking about race.

Intra-Democratic argument has long counterposed universalist to race-specific policies as means of making major changes in racial politics. There is a serious problem with the first approach. At any moment it is in the short-term interest of most white Democrats to say as little as possible about race. This is because high levels of black support can be presumed, while efforts to increase or even publicly affirm that support can have counter-mobilizing effects. But if saying as little as possible about race makes short-term sense, it leaves open a wide field for Republican efforts. Republicans are free to decide when to play the

card of racial preferences, against which centrist and left Democrats lack any effective defense. Democrats are continually vulnerable to white racial appeals by Republicans, appeals that are likely to jeopardize all their political efforts. Clinton has shown little interest in finding a way to escape this dilemma other than through the long-term and indirect effects of improved public policies. When his administration cannot provide such policies, the result is failure in racial politics as well as in the policy areas in question.

Yet the burden of argument now lies on people who want to challenge racial inequities directly. If they simply say "let's talk about race" they are likely to be viewed by Democratic centrists as endangering an already weak Democratic coalition. To make political advances they need to be able to say, "let's talk about my proposal for reducing racial inequality without racial polarization." Talking about race should not be equated with inciting racial polarization. But pointing out the unfairness will change little.

Why Was Guinier Defeated?

In a talk on matters related to this article, I showed a picture of Lani Guinier from the cover of her book to a group of graduate students in Hungary, and asked them to designate her ethnicity. They said she might be North African but was most likely Italian. During the debate about her nomination she was identified as black, though one of her parents is African-American ("black") and the other Jewish-American ("white"). The certainty of this designation does as much as a hundred articles to show the rigid character of racial categories in the United States, so that no one who wants to talk about them can be fairly charged with calling them forth.

If American racial categories leave no doubt that Guinier is "black," her own work has several locations. Her legal and political arguments in the 1980s and 1990s are part of an emerging body of work produced by what

might be called a radical democratic or post-Marxist left in the United States. Guinier is part of several networks of legal and political theorists who favor democracy rather than “socialism” as the ground of a critique of prevailing practices; emphasize inequality and exclusion as the main forms of domination; and are uneasy with liberal universalism—unwilling to abandon its egalitarian force but suspicious that it masks rather than undermines inequality.

Guinier’s work is also located in the field of civil rights law, focused on the Voting Rights Act. She is at odds with critics who think that the Act has been turned into a quota system. And she differs with defenders of the Act who, she believes, are too easily satisfied with measures that increase the number of black officeholders through redistricting, without enhancing participation or the quality of representation. Guinier wants the Voting Rights Act and other civil rights legislation to be opened up as means of changing procedures and outcomes as well as numbers. Hers is a distinctive conception, advanced in a responsible way. Taken with her radical democratic orientation, it makes her political defeat all the more significant. The problems she met in gaining a position for which she was well qualified are broad problems of the radical democratic left in public argument.

Why were Guinier and her political allies in the civil rights community and on the legal left defeated? I put the question this way, rather than asking why she was treated so badly. Her treatment was tough but not brutal, especially by current standards. The sharp attacks were not highly personal. Several critiques of her views showed that their writers had read parts of her articles or at least a fairly reliable summary of them. How could one expect the appointment of someone responsible for interpreting and enforcing civil rights laws under the first Democratic president in more than a decade to be a process without strong polemics and efforts to do real political damage?

Lani Guinier was not mainly a victim in this episode but an important political actor who lost. It does not clarify what happened to claim she was “the target of a stunning campaign of

caricature and misrepresentation.”⁵ She was the target of a fierce political attack from several forces. Guinier was defeated mainly by centrist and center-right Democrats who effectively pressured an ambivalent Clinton. And her position was weakened by failing to show Clinton one of two things that might have changed his mind.

First, she—I mean not only Guinier, but her allies and defenders—might have shown Clinton that the political cleavage around her nomination could be rapidly reshaped. If he had believed that this line could be redrawn soon (moved in a northwest direction in Figure 1), so the bitter fight would do less damage in intra-Democratic relations, he might have allowed the nomination to proceed to a Senate debate. Without any signs of this reshaping, Clinton was not being weak in withdrawing the nomination; a Senate debate was what he wanted to avoid. Second, Guinier and her allies could have shown Clinton that a fierce intra-Democratic fight would be worthwhile because of the political advances that her nomination would encourage. But Guinier and her supporters did not seem to be close to having promising solutions to racial inequity that would have warranted a costly fight with center and center-right Democrats.

Under attack, Guinier made an ambivalent defense of her own writings as not really so controversial—after all, her proposals for changing electoral procedures were hypothetical and were published in obscure journals in technical language. This self-effacement didn’t get far. Guinier’s main proposals are considered and well argued. She develops these proposals at length and puts them near the center of her arguments. Her articles are written in decently clear and sometimes powerful English and require no apology for being too technical or full of jargon. The defense on grounds of obscurity was a minor embarrassing moment in this episode. For a prospective civil rights appointee in the Justice Department (or her advocates) to say that her positions should not be taken too seriously because they appeared in the *Michigan Law Review* is like a controversial State Department

nominee saying her work should not be scrutinized excessively because she was writing in *Foreign Affairs*.

Her view is that the Voting Rights Act as conventionally understood has been played out as a major means of generating racial equality in politics. Thus we should now entertain a wide range of proposals about reshaping institutional procedures. The aim should be to devise procedures that will elect more blacks, but not any blacks, or at all cost—the aim is to elect blacks whose political views resemble those of the black electorate.⁶ The goal is to produce more policy outcomes that black voters prefer, in conditions of expanded black political participation. Guinier is critical of mainly territorial formulas. Expanding the number of majority-black districts may increase the number of black elected officials, but it can also create new political ghettos where a lack of competition and declining participation combine to decrease the quality of representation. Thus while Guinier does not reject redistricting measures aimed at producing black representatives, she stresses procedural changes in how representative bodies are constituted.

Not surprisingly, Guinier's harshest critics had heard all they needed by this point to decide she was out of bounds. For them, any change of electoral forms aimed at expanding the number and "quality" of black officials is an illegitimate interference with voters' preferences and a de facto quota. A few points should suffice to show that this unqualified rejection is not reasonable. First, no one believes that electoral procedures are arrived at through the most open of market-like means. Electoral rules have always aimed at both fairness and substantive outcomes, with their proponents often being unable to tell the difference. So there is nothing wrong with advocating change in electoral procedures, if proposals are made in mainly neutral ways (for example, let's achieve greater stability, rather than let's make sure I am always reelected).

Second, we should want adequate political representation of all parts of the population, defining "part" as a group with social features that make it a plausible and likely site of

political interpretation (Chicanos, say, but not tall people). When blacks make up over 10 percent of the population and less than 2 percent of elected officials, the situation definitely merits attention and seems likely to be unjust.⁷

Not all distributive differences warrant public concern. The idea that expanding the number of black representatives is desirable holds up because of its particular features. Representation is a crucial good in liberal and democratic polities. It is a resource for defining the terms on which other resources are distributed, and the procedures through which distributive decisions are made. We generally presume that everyone wants to be represented, and take extreme differences in levels of political participation as evidence of something other than differing preferences. We also expect political ambition to be widely distributed over the entire population. Thus an effective critique of many affirmative action schemes—the current pattern registers people's real preferences and should not be disturbed without a very strong showing of discrimination—is on much weaker ground regarding the composition of representative bodies than of symphony orchestras, say, or dental schools, or plumbers' unions.

These points open the door to proposals that might change the racial composition of elected bodies. No proposal is thereby justified; one might conclude in every case that the costs are too great. Here I consider four relevant features of arguments about race and politics in the U.S. today: judging the extent of the need for change; quotas and preferential treatment; relations between political and social identities; and insularity in procedural proposals. I refer to Guinier's work, but not to provide another review of her book.⁸ The point is to assess how her approach, and by implication the approach of the radical democratic left, fared in the political combat over her nomination.

Where Are We Now?

Guinier was accused of racial polarization when in her view she was simply naming a racially divided social and political reality.

Against most of her critics, it was reasonable to affirm the enduring reality of racial inequity. Guinier's trouble stemmed partly from how she did this. Her characterizations of the racial situation tend to be sweepingly negative, and give the impression that little has changed since the early 1960s. Part of this may be contextual: it must be tedious as a black intellectual to feel pressured to begin every commentary with an acknowledgment of racial change. It is easy to sympathize with a certain reluctance to repeat conventional statements about how much reform has occurred.

The number of black officials is much smaller than the proportion of the population that is black. Yet in the two decades since the Voting Rights Act passed there has been a major and historically unprecedented growth in black political participation and in the number of black elected officials. Guinier doesn't take much analytical account of this situation. She argues as if any policies that might be justified in the situation of the early 1960s are justified still because inequalities remain. This is not a peculiar defect of Guinier's work but a common trope in radical democratic critiques, such as those concerning gender inequality. The argument is, as Guinier's case showed, a probable loser outside the confines of left-of-center political and intellectual circles. It leaves her position open to criticism as hyperbolic and excessive: doesn't she appreciate how much has changed? While often condescending, this criticism is effective because it focuses on a real weakness—a seeming lack of balance in making judgments. The only alternatives that seem to get theoretical attention are unmitigated racial domination and thoroughgoing equality.

What is the scope and meaning of racial inequality in politics? Racial inequality is not mainly a legacy of prior patterns of exclusion, but of ongoing patterns of racial politics influenced by other forms of inequality (as of economic resources). It is extensive, especially at higher levels. But the inequality is uneven, and does not prevent blacks from participating in politics or from achieving substantial success at the local level. There is not an unchanging racial exclusion based on sheer domination

accompanied by racial hatred. Now racial themes are woven tightly together with nonracial elements in such a way that it is rarely accurate simply to characterize a discourse as racist.

Today political relations between "blacks" and "whites" are asymmetrical, and unfairly so. No market-like political competition seems likely to clear away unjust inequalities in the near future. In political representation there are modest trends toward greater equality. These trends are not certain to continue, however, and even if they did it would be decades before large inequities disappeared. Exclusion and marginality are not the right words for this situation, which is one of slowly diminishing racial domination.

The Quota Mess

What measures are now appropriate—and what costs are acceptable—to remove inequities in political representation between blacks and whites? Guinier was accused of favoring quotas. She said she did not favor them. How could this be open to debate? Think about the following ways in which one might address the number of blacks in the House and Senate.

1. State delegations will not be seated unless the percentage of black members is greater than or equal to the proportion of blacks in the state population.

2. Strong measures should be taken to increase the presence of blacks, with the eventual aim of making their numbers roughly equivalent to the percentage of the national population that is black. These measures should include changes in electoral procedures, including voting rules and districting, and might include legal requirements for political parties (for example, no public financing if serious candidates are all white).

3. Strong measures are necessary to increase the presence of blacks, but these should be undertaken on a voluntary basis by parties and other political organizations, along with strict federal scrutiny of electoral practices that have racially exclusive effects.

4. Black candidates and voters should face

no legal or customary measures that impede the exercise of their rights to vote and run for office.

Which of these policies is a quota? Guinier clearly did not favor the first approach. But many of her critics consider anything beyond the fourth approach to be a quota, with the partial exception of mild versions of the third. They believe that the second and most versions of the third lead in practice toward the first. Critics of Guinier were being hyperbolic, but not entirely dishonest. Her position indicates measures that lie between 2 and 3. When she conceives legal mechanisms (court action and laws about election procedures) as the way to change the size and quality of black representation, her views exemplify the second approach. For critics, any such view has quota-like effects in restricting choice and creating new inequalities.

One could fill pages insisting that Guinier's work does not involve support for quotas because she rejects the first approach and the most stringent versions of the second. Yet doing so would have little effect on the result, given the widespread opposition to the second and third approaches. The burden of argument is now on the left in these matters, and neither Guinier nor her allies came close to an adequate response. When is it legitimate to advocate a racial redistribution of positions, and how can this be done without rigid quotas?

Racial preferences in public policy should be self-limiting. There should be clear schedules not only for the achievement of distributive goals but for the dismantling of the means by which those goals are achieved. These schedules should have a plausible basis in the forms and logic of the proposed program. Thus, in a market context, racial preferences might clear the scene of racial monopolies, at which point the "natural" results of the new market would not call for further intervention—even if they were less than optimal from the standpoint of racial equality. This is a hard condition to meet with political offices, where there is no full cognate of the market. But those who advocate policies that apply racial criteria to electoral procedures need to specify a threshold of

outcomes past which legal regulation would not be needed. The figure I suggest is 50 percent of the overall number of offices: if a socially distinct minority subject to previous or ongoing forms of political discrimination makes up 10 percent of the population, efforts to alter electoral procedures might properly end when that group's members occupy 5 percent of all offices. This figure is open to debate. But without stipulating a plausible goal, and reasonable ways of attaining it, advocates of new electoral procedures are vulnerable to charges that they aim for a permanent regime of racial supervision and redistribution. Proponents of measures aimed at expanding minority political representation need to show how their proposals would lead to that result without creating immovable new institutions.

If we want to reshape political procedures to increase the presence of members of certain groups in offices, what are we doing? In one conception, we are opening political institutions to participation by members of excluded social groups. In another conception, we are trying to enhance the strength of particular political ideas.

The extraordinary electoral situation of blacks in the United States today makes it hard to distinguish these two aims. About 90 percent of blacks who vote choose the Democratic party, and perhaps 60 percent to 70 percent of blacks who vote identify with the left of the Democratic party. In electoral competition, it is very unusual for 90 percent of any group to choose a single party; anything over 60 percent is a strong party constituency. Today "black" or "African-American" designates *both* a dominated social group and a distinctive political group. It was once accurate to say that labor was Democratic and thereby to name not only the official stance of the trade unions but the orientation of large parts of the working class. It is now even more accurate to say that African-Americans are Democratic.

The political concentration of blacks intersects the complex relations between political and social identities to produce tangled formulations that played a role in hurting Guinier's

nomination. In making her case for "interest representation" she begins by claiming that, "The term 'interest' refers to self-identified interests, meaning those high salience needs, wants, and demands articulated by any politically cohesive group of voters." Two paragraphs later, she continues her argument by naming a social group rather than a political group: "For example, in a 25 percent black jurisdiction with four at-large representatives . . ." ⁹ This unexamined shift illustrates the double presence of "blacks" as a social group and a political group in her analyses. There is a reasonable empirical basis for this identification, but the relative political unity among blacks is by no means absolute. It does not justify her move, and opens her to the criticism that she is seeking to gain advantages for particular political views because of prior and ongoing discrimination against some of the people who hold them.

Insofar as Guinier claims that political changes are required to include blacks fairly as a social group in American politics, the argument is unproblematic in principle (bracketing the question of what measures to employ). But she often seems to be arguing something more: that blacks as a political group or as bearers of a particular political identity deserve special consideration and institutional reform to ensure their expanded presence. The problem is that political minorities—groups whose views and programs have the support of less than half the voters—do not deserve special treatment as such. What they deserve is a fair chance to fight again. The political views of blacks do not deserve to guide public decisions because of past or present racial domination.

This is a contentious area for the post-Marxist left. Much of its theoretical work has criticized the determinism of Marxist views of the relation between social and political categories, crucially regarding class. Thus the notion of "class interest" was rejected because of how it translated social into political terms without opening any space for political argument. Guinier's formulations lack Marxist referents. Like similar formulations by other theorists, however, they tend to reduce the

political to the social. Now the groups are racial and ethnic minorities and women, not classes; and the means of reduction is a concept of identity rather than one of class interest. So: a black identity designates the way black people interpret their social experience in making political arguments and claims.

The overwhelming (left) Democratic commitment of blacks routinely seems to validate the idea of a shared identity that fuses political views and social experiences. But that fusion is also a source of trouble for thinking about racial politics. It encourages the idea that there is one true way to interpret the shared social experiences of blacks, and that this interpretation defines a black political identity. Hence Guinier's occasional references to "authentic" black representatives. Perhaps, as she later suggested, "authentic" is merely a synonym for accurate, as in a more or less accurate representation of the views of constituents. Her writings allow this interpretation, but they also allow the one for which she was criticized: a good black representative is authentic insofar as he or she expresses the political views that are part of a previously defined black identity. This position looks like special pleading for particular political views, which merit attention and even acceptance because of the deep connections of their advocates to a significant group of people. To square her notion of identity with a commitment to procedural fairness, Guinier claims that interest representation is nonsubstantive. This could be true if by interests one meant the general political interest of social groups in attaining representation. But in her discussions of identity and authenticity, both terms refer to the political interpretation of a social group's experience—the resulting "interests" are unavoidably substantive.

It is probably a good idea to get rid of notions of identity that presume tight links between social experience and political views. "Blacks" should not be understood as an already political term, any more than "women," "Christians," or "Chicanos." Such notions too often reject any real distinction between social and political life, and lead to a moralistic political style focused on whether

one or another position is authentic and sincere. This style discourages modes of political argument where reasons have to be given and criticisms met. Efforts will always be made to claim that one or another political position is the genuine and natural position of a particular group. Yet making clear that political positions are arguments about what social groups need can reduce dubious claims about authenticity and encourage more useful debate.

There is further trouble for the democratic left in this territory: a collision between a view of politics as the articulation of identities and a view of politics as deliberation. This collision is loud in the area of representation, precisely where Guinier's work is focused. If African-Americans in office are understood to have relatively fixed political positions that express black social and cultural identities, they will be acting responsibly when they seek the goals those identities designate. Though the content is distinctive, this is a familiar and legitimate model of interest representation. But it doesn't leave much room for deliberative processes.

A powerful current in contemporary democratic theories stresses the value of open communication and deliberation in articulating issues and reaching generally acceptable outcomes. If deliberation differs in any major way from bargaining, it must mean that representatives engaged in it can arrive at positions they did not start with. They can be persuaded of the merit of other positions, or something new and compelling can be built through dialogue. For such deliberation to get anywhere representatives must enjoy considerable autonomy from their constituents: they are not bound merely to register existing preferences. Thus representatives engaged seriously in deliberation are unlikely to remain "authentic" representatives of particular groups for very long. To stay in office they will face a difficult choice between returning to their "authentic" positions or trying to initiate new relations with their constituents in which claims of authenticity have a diminished role.

Losing and Fairness

The subtitle of Guinier's book—"Fundamental Fairness in Representative Democracy"—links ideas about fairness to expectations about the results of political contests. In the context of racial politics since the passage of the Voting Rights Act, this is an understandable move. If blacks now organize themselves and vote to elect a (black) representative to a city council or county board of supervisors and then always lose on a six-to-one vote along racial lines, this pattern does not seem fair, even if it is proper in procedural terms. Given a conception of identity as a fusion of social and political elements dominated by the former, this sort of losing is read as the enforced marginalization of blacks. Alternatively, such losses can be seen as due to their lack of political power and the unpopularity of the political views they advocate.

Is repeated losing the result of racism or of unpopular positions? Looking again at Figure 1 makes clear how hard it is to distinguish the two interpretations, given where most blacks are located in contemporary politics. Blacks' political positions are unpopular. They are not wholly isolated, in the sense that millions of other people have similar views, especially on social and economic policy. But it is no surprise that proposals from the Black Caucus/NOW cell don't often pass in Congress.

If blacks had more diverse political views, would they gain greater representation among elected officials? Are there racial elements in the rejection of left-Democratic policies, that is, do many whites who might otherwise find positions in cell 9 acceptable reject them because of a perception that these are "black" positions? Issues of fairness would arise if the answer to the second question were clearly yes and political outcomes were often produced by mainly racial concerns. This degree of racialization of politics does not generally exist, though debate in areas like welfare policy comes close.

If basic political positions are not adopted on mainly racial grounds, there is a real dilemma. On the one hand, it seems unfair that decades of political exclusion of blacks be followed by

decades of political marginality. On the other hand, there really is no remedy for losing in a reasonably open political contest, except that a loser should be able to fight again and have the option of forming coalitions.

Guinier aims to overcome this dilemma by applying the notion of fairness to political outcomes. This move is compelling against the background of two strains in modern political thought. One is the concern with the political fate of minorities that has been widespread since the onset of mass suffrage: how can means be found to prevent majoritarian procedures from becoming tyrannical? The other is concern with distributive justice. The connection drawn by Guinier (and others) is that political outcomes should be fairly distributed, registering the equality of individuals and a right to equal influence.

This argument skillfully bridges conventional political divisions. It links the anti-majoritarianism developed by those concerned that the masses would band together and destroy privileged elites with a post-Rawlsian effort to expand the range of distributive justice as far as possible into politics. Yet its underlying conception of politics is wrong. Referring to legally protected minority groups, Guinier proposes the following standard for evaluating decision-making rules: "1. that each group has a right to have its *interests* represented, and 2. that each group has a right to have its interests satisfied a fair proportion of the time."¹⁰ The second point could be interpreted in two ways. If it means that groups have a right to seek to gain their interests without facing discrimination, it reduces to the first point. If it means that groups have a right to a certain portion of victories in political conflicts, it entails a notion of "fair" outcomes beyond whatever results from fair procedures. That seems to be her point. Thus when she criticizes racial bloc voting by a majority, the implication is that fair political representation entails that minorities win political battles in rough proportion to their weight in the electorate. But if political outcomes could be distributed equally among legitimate groups, we wouldn't need a political system. We could just have a department of political accounting.

By almost any definition, politics entails collective decisions on many indivisible goods (should the United States invade Haiti or not?). Thus it includes lots of losing, by people deeply convinced of the merit of their position. Guinier's argument leads to proposals that black elected officials have a veto on what they deem vital issues. This would add new antimajoritarian devices to a political system already full of them. Moreover, it entails not thinking about the all-round application of principles that might first benefit the group one supports. If blacks have a policy veto in some areas, why not Catholics in others? And what grounds would exist for criticizing the famous practical veto exercised by leading business groups seeking a good "business climate"?

The main problem is that Guinier and other radical democrats seem to reject the dimensions of politics that have to do with power, conflict, uncertainty, and innovation. This tendency results first from understanding political representation as a means of expressing social identities and, second, minimizing the effects of losing by treating political outcomes as shares of a pie. But no one can be guaranteed an equal share of political outcomes in a system of open political deliberation and organization, even if everyone has an equal role in decisions. Participants may have strong preferences for policies that they cannot persuade others to regard as just. Sometimes outcomes are unexpected results of procedures; other times they reflect differing skills.

Even if procedures were as outcome-neutral as could be imagined and participants were equally skilled, outcomes could not be shared out. They are partly a function of the properties of political choices themselves. In form, political choices are often indivisible, severely time-constrained, momentous, cumulative, and irreversible. In content, political choices refer to shared notions of justice that are not open to just any interpretation. We can try to temper the wild, dangerous, and surprising features of political conflict, but there is no way to get rid of them.

Radical democrats are deeply divided about

politics. They (we) affirm discourse and deliberation, and also want to protect against "unfair" outcomes. The result is conceptual tension and ambivalence—and proposals like Guinier's for interest group vetoes that are easily attacked as antidemocratic. If such proposals are not antidemocratic in spirit, they are nonpolitical.

The alternative logic, one of building majorities in a diverse society, also has problems. Trying to build coalitions can allow minority groups to exit from the ghettos into which they were forced by political domination. It can encourage divisions within majority groups when sections of those groups consider previously stigmatized alliances. A majority-building approach may not work when a minority is as politically concentrated as blacks now are. If it does work, in the sense that a minority group can form part of a winning political force, the center of that coalition may be so far away from the minority that the latter's benefits are very modest. This is a common feature of contemporary racial politics, as political forces based in mainly black communities are part of a centrist Democratic coalition. But the modesty of the payoff is mainly a political problem, due to real differences within the coalition, rather than a racial problem. If black political forces are on the far left of a winning coalition they should expect what the far left of winning coalitions usually gets, which is as little as centrist forces think they can safely provide.

Should blacks reduce their political underrepresentation by flocking to the Republican party? If only a sixth of black voters were willing to bear this burden, it might change the overall situation. But even playing with this idea makes clear the difficulty of the current situation in racial politics. It might take only modest adjustments in Republican policies to gain another 10 percent or 15 percent of the black vote. When parties that want to win overlook such opportunities, there is usually a reason. In this case, such adjustments would mean abandoning the muted but powerful racial appeal that Republicans make to whites, and the ensuing losses would probably far exceed gains among black voters.

A majority-building approach is inadequate without strong antidiscrimination efforts. Even with measures against racial discrimination, efforts to build majority coalitions by political minorities linked to racially defined social groups can be frustrated, partly on racial grounds. The deciding point is not the necessarily benign results of a coalition-building approach, but the worse results of treating political outcomes as distributive shares.

Insularity

Guinier's political defeat was not singular. Clinton's failed nomination symbolizes other radical democratic efforts that flounder partly due to their insularity. What seems lacking is a serious effort to imagine how one's proposals will be heard by likely opponents and how the proposals would work in practice. This is a problem with several of Guinier's proposals. Before I take up one example, it is worth noting that some criticisms made of her work in this area are off base. First, there is nothing wrong with posing alternatives to standard electoral procedures. These are open to renegotiation in American politics, and have changed at a number of points in the past. Second, posing local alternatives to simple majority rule is not in principle antidemocratic. A democratic polity is nowhere only a majority-rule regime; it results from an interplay of decision rules that combine to provide an equal voice to citizens in stable conditions of open political competition. Most democratic states seek to foster stability in ways that value some votes over others in specific contexts in order to sustain a regime that upholds a broad commitment to equity (for example, the Senate in the United States).

What about the moves Guinier suggests? To represent a minority social group that is geographically concentrated, a good means is district representation. To represent a minority political view, some form of proportional representation is effective. Through her use of identity, Guinier combines elements of these conceptions. She proposes that blacks are a minority political group who need to secure a

larger presence in public life. On this basis she recommends cumulative voting so that minorities could concentrate their votes. Imagine one thousand voters choosing ten representatives. Then imagine that one hundred of the one thousand belong to a distinct group [x] interested in electing its own members. If each voter has ten votes, and the members of group [x] pool all their votes for one candidate, he or she will be elected. (In this situation any vote share above $1/(1+s)$ where s equals the number of seats guarantees a seat—in this case, group [x] has 1/10 of the votes and only needs 1/11 to make sure of winning a representative.)

So far so good. But this account depends on a highly unrealistic assumption: that only one candidate who belongs to group [x] will get all the votes of members of that group. This assumption might be reasonable for voting in committees or perhaps for brief moments in legislatures. But it is simply wrong regarding how candidates arise and how large, diverse groups act in electoral competition. To see the problem that would arise with cumulative voting in an actual setting, all that is necessary is to modify the assumption of a single candidate and instead assume that while all members of group [x] will vote for candidates who belong to that group, political ambition is as widely distributed among group [x] as elsewhere (thus many candidates) and members of group [x] are not wholly politically united (thus bargains have to be struck). Due to this change in assumptions there are now four group [x] candidates rather than one. Once again, each voter has ten votes—if all the votes from members of group [x] go to these candidates, they will average two hundred and fifty votes each. That seems to be a good result.

But imagine another group [y] in the same electorate. It has one hundred and fifty members, and five candidates. Its candidates will average three hundred votes and lead all of group [x]'s candidates. Then imagine that group [z] has two hundred and fifty members and six candidates—each one will receive over four hundred votes. As a result, no candidates from group [x] win.

What is going on? The reason for this

surprising outcome is that most proportional representation systems reward the largest cohesive minority. In conditions of severe racial polarization, blacks would never be the largest cohesive minority; a white counter group would certainly form. For Guinier's proposals to produce the outcome she intends, blacks have to be cohesive and whites dispersed. Then blacks will at least be represented in proportion to their numbers. And they will do better as the extent of white fragmentation increases—the more white parties, the farther the black vote will go.

The problem is that for Guinier's proposal to work well, key conditions need to be virtually the opposite of those specified in her argument. Whites need to be divided among themselves and not very interested in voting against blacks per se. But to motivate her proposal Guinier depicts whites as persistently antiblack and apt to form alliances on that basis. If this is true, there would be a prompt and usually effective white response to black strategic voting—most black candidates would be defeated by white bloc voting. Thus under conditions of sharp racial polarization, Guinier's proposed reform would have mainly negative results.

Procedural proposals have to be considered as though one's adversaries might be smart enough to employ them. But to criticize Guinier's proposal neither invalidates her efforts nor rules out other approaches. For example, several local electoral procedures might enhance black representation without so strongly inviting antiblack strategic efforts. One model is a mixed local system combining district and at-large elements. District forms would provide a floor below which territorially concentrated groups would be unlikely to fall, while at-large seats would encourage coalition formation.

Another local model would replace districts with at-large seats for all offices, but add a further requirement. To win, candidates would have to receive a minimum vote in a number of geographical areas. Thus if there were ten offices to be filled via at-large procedures, a candidate might be required to obtain 20 percent of the vote in at least seven of ten "districts." This model might be appropriate

where the minority population is substantial and racial polarization is serious, requiring candidates to gain support across racial lines. It amounts to a local adaptation of the principles that justify an electoral college in presidential elections, forcing candidates to seek support from different states and regions rather than trying to win an overall majority by piling up huge margins in limited areas.

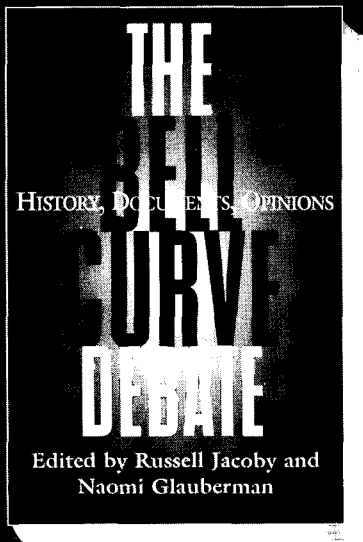
Numerous experiments with local electoral procedures might be reasonable. But efforts to expand black representation will fail if they are made in terms of symmetry, that is, since whites spent decades changing electoral procedures to marginalize blacks, whatever blacks want to do to compensate for this exclusion is fair. Instead, proposals that aim to increase the number of black officeholders must also aim to enhance electoral outcomes in terms of shared values across racial groups (such as fairness in inclusion, accuracy in registering constituent preferences, improved political debate). Demo-

cratic and procedural improvements should be tightly linked.

Democratic Dilemmas in Racial Politics

In discussing the problems that helped stop Guinier's nomination I have tried to suggest positions that might be more politically viable while remaining committed to equity in racial politics. Advocates of expanded minority representation should aim for balanced judgments about current inequalities. Racial preferences should be proposed in forms that are plausibly self-limiting. It is wrong to think about political outcomes as distributive shares, while the proper remedy for losing is building a winning political force. And changes in electoral procedures should be considered both in terms of whether they are consistent with a democratic regime (Guinier's mostly are), and in terms of their likely results for the choices of all relevant political agents. These positions are

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at best starting points for debates about policies, given the difficulty of the current situation in racial politics.

The Clinton-Guinier episode had a disappointing outcome. It gained little credit for Clinton. What he won by avoiding wrenching arguments with centrist and center-right Democrats about race was mostly lost by appearing disloyal and easily pressured. Clinton was the crucial figure in stopping the nomination of Guinier. He wanted to prevent a loud nomination fight that would deepen divisions in his coalition. To downplay his role is to evade reflection on the costs of the predominant centrist Democratic approach to racial politics—to enforce civil rights laws in a moderate way and hope that universalist social reforms will succeed well enough to sustain black commitments and slowly depolarize race relations. Thus the attempts at health care and welfare reform *are* the Clinton administration's racial policies. If there is little to admire in Clinton's performance, Guinier and her allies contributed to their defeat. Later complaints about mistreatment discouraged political thinking about what might have been done differently.

The preceding account should help make sense of why the Clinton-Guinier episode seemed so full of misunderstanding and confusion. These features were symptoms of a real political dilemma. Clinton regarded Guinier with respect and even affection; she looked forward to assuming a new position. He quickly came to see her political views as disruptive of his own project and had no trouble choosing that project over friendship, making his choice in a clumsy way. She was surprised by the sudden turn against her and attributed it to right-wing pressure and Clinton's unclarity.

Unless one considers Clinton's overall position, his actions toward the Guinier nomination seem even more *maladroit* than they were. It is clear from what Guinier has written that if the Clinton administration wanted to build ties to politically active black intellectuals, Guinier would be a good choice, one improved by her personal qualifications. Ties with people like

Guinier would seem to be an important way of engaging younger black intellectuals while keeping a distance from those who have marked out positions well to her left. If it seems commonsensical that Clinton would want Guinier around, this judgment is wrong. Appreciating why leads straight back to the dilemmas of the Democratic center. Clinton is an ambivalent political figure who is highly sensitive to political pressure from any direction, but especially from right of center Democrats. To hear that Guinier was a politically safer figure than people somewhat to her left (say Patricia Williams or Cornel West) was to hear nothing of interest to an administration seeking to mute racial conflict as much as possible.

The Republican victory in the 1994 elections had a distinct racial character. There was a sharp decline in white support for Democrats from 50 percent in 1990 to 42 percent in 1992, while black support declined only from 89 percent to 88 percent.¹¹ This result will intensify tensions among Democrats concerning racial politics. It provides no support for claiming that a stronger advocacy of racial redistribution or even of expanded debate about race would have electoral benefits. But those who favor downplaying racial politics in favor of universalist social reform can find little comfort, as the administration mainly pursued their policy without producing either reform or electoral gain. The situation is now close to an unspoken Republican ideal, with a huge gulf between white and black voting (46 points) and a strong Republican majority among whites. Changing this situation will require conceptual and political innovation beyond anything now on the political scene. The massive Democratic defeat is likely to strengthen Clinton's preference for a racial politics of silence and indirect amelioration. Those who find this stance unattractive both on principle and on strategic grounds need to think of something better to say about how racial equity can be achieved. □

The author wishes to thank Thomas Cavanagh and Michael Walzer for comments and editorial suggestions.

Notes

¹ *New York Times*, June 4, 1993.

² The attack on Guinier's writings came first from Republicans and the far right, as in Clint Bolick, "Clinton's Quota Queens," *Wall Street Journal*, April 30, 1993.

³ Abigail Thernstrom, "Guinier Miss"; Editorial, "Withdraw Guinier," the *New Republic*, June 14, 1993. In case readers missed the point, the headline at the top of the cover was: "The Guinier Nomination: A Clinton Betrayal."

⁴ Stephen L. Carter, "Foreword," to Lani Guinier, *The Tyranny of the Majority: Fundamental Fairness in Representative Democracy* (The Free Press, 1994): vii-xx. Carter also neglects to mention the attacks on Guinier in the the *New Republic*.

⁵ Joshua Cohen and Frank Michelman, Letter to the Editor, *New York Times*, June 13, 1993. Cohen and Michelman were on solid ground in criticizing a misreading of Guinier's work by Carol M. Swain, "Black-Majority Districts: A Bad Idea," *New York Times*, June 3, 1993.

⁶ My claims about Guinier's positions are based on her

book and several of her articles, especially "The Triumph of Tokenism: The Voting Rights Act and the Theory of Black Electoral Success," 89 U. Mich. L. Rev. 1077 (1991); and "No Two Seats: The Elusive Quest for Political Equality," 77 U. Va. L. Rev. 1413 (Nov. 1991).

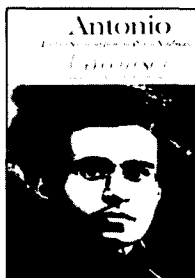
⁷ In 1993 African Americans made up 8,015 of the 467,196 elected officials in the United States, or 1.61 percent. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, *Black Elected Officials: A National Roster*, 1993.

⁸ For reviews see Cass R. Sunstein, "Voting Rites," the *New Republic*, April 25, 1994; Mark Tushnet, "Who Cares About Voting Rights?," *Boston Review*, June-September 1994; Alan Wolfe, "Redesigning Democracy," *New York Times Book Review*, March 13, 1994. For a critique of Guinier's work as that of a "harsh and confrontational partisan" see Charles Fried, "President Clinton Won't Give Me a Job Either," *Reconstruction*, Volume 2, Number 3, 1994, pp. 127-136.

⁹ Guinier, *Tyranny of the Majority*, p. 94.

¹⁰ Guinier, *Tyranny of the Majority*, p. 104.

¹¹ *New York Times*, November 13, 1994.



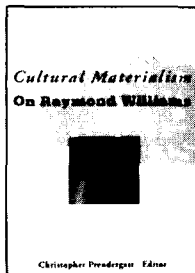
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FREUD ON TRIAL

Revisionist scholarship on Freud has become a total assault on his achievement. If it were to succeed, virtually nothing would be left to value in his work. What would remain is a view of his legacy as a poison in our culture that needs to be purged. Two recent publishing events show how far the anti-Freud attack has carried: a featured review of four works of revisionist literature by Frederick Crews in the highbrow *New York Review of Books* and a cover story in the middlebrow *Time* that raises the question, "Is Freud Dead?"¹ Crews himself was once a distinguished practitioner of psychoanalytic criticism. The ferocity of his attack has all the animus of a resentful renegade, though he offers the reader no account of his own evolution from champion of psychoanalysis to implacable adversary. Freud, the riddle-solver, identified himself with Oedipus. In the eyes of Crews and others, he has become Laius, an invitation to parricide.

Crews devotes a good deal of space to Freud's alleged unscrupulousness in the cooking of evidence (for example, his unreliable reporting of what actually occurred in his therapeutic encounters) and in his manipulation of patients to serve the interests of psychoanalysis. He recounts a story of how Freud induced a patient and protégé to divorce his wife and marry one of his own patients, a bank heiress, who would then provide funds for Freud's psychoanalytic projects. Freud was able to accomplish this feat by persuading the protégé that he was a latent homosexual and that the new marriage would somehow keep him from a homosexual fate. "The divorce and remarriage" resulted "in the deaths of both of the abandoned, devastated spouses," an early suit for divorce by the newly married woman and repeated attempts at suicide by Freud's protégé.²

But this is mere gossip compared to the charge that the seduction theory, central to psychoanalysis, was an invention of Freud's without much basis in clinical experience—that he induced his patients to believe in events they did not remember before they came for analysis. Having then decided that these events did not actually take place, Freud concluded that they were fantasies of the patients, in effect erasing their origins in his own theory. His critics lay recent scandals in repressed memory therapy and clinical practice at the door of his own theory and practice. What emerges is a view of psychoanalytic theory as an imaginative construction drawn from Freud's own fantasy life and a clinical enterprise cynically devoted to supporting it at all costs.

The main thrust of the attack on Freud is that he lacks scientific credibility. Anyone who tries to understand the issues finds himself on treacherous ground. There is first the question of whether Freud's status as a thinker depends upon his claim to be a scientist. The philosopher of science Adolph Grünbaum takes Freud at his word that he be judged as a scientist and finds him wanting. Habermas and Ricoeur reject Freud's "scientistic self-misunderstanding" and claim him for hermeneutics. Grünbaum and Karl Popper, both severe critics of Freud, disagree about whether Freud's thought is falsifiable (a necessary condition of science), Grünbaum arguing that it is, Popper that it is not. Philosophers of science do not hold that scientific theories necessarily rise or fall when statements within the theories are falsified. Theoretical survival depends upon the character and degree of falsification. The issue is further complicated if one takes seriously Thomas Kuhn's theory of paradigms in which the demarcation between science and nonscience

loses its sharpness. Crews's all-out assault takes none of these matters into consideration.

What are the reasons for the wholesale condemnation of Freud's achievement? The *Time* article suggests several reasons: these include the problematical proliferation of "accusations of sexual abuse" based on the recovery of repressed memory, the superior success of drug treatment "in the alleviation of mental disorders," and the discovery of numerous "errors, duplicities and fudged evidence" in psychoanalytic studies. These are plausible reasons, but they do not explain the extremity of the attack on Freud, which reflects, I believe, his unusual authority in our culture.

The history of culture is filled with authority figures: Plato, Aristotle, the church fathers, thinkers who have guided, if not determined, our thinking. Certain writers become objects of idolatry. Their achievements are measured not by their capacity to answer to a reality external to them. They themselves are the measures of truth. Michel Foucault calls them (Freud and Marx are his examples) founders of discursivity. They provide the master texts that determine truth claims. Unlike scientists, these founders of discursivity are not required to conform to the canons of science. Their own discourse constitutes the canon that determines its truth value. "One defines a proposition's theoretical validity in relation to the work of the founders—while, in the case of Galileo and Newton, it is in relation to what physics or cosmology *is* (in its intrinsic structure and 'normality') that one affirms the validity of any proposition that those men may have put forth. To phrase it very schematically: the voice of initiators of discursivity is not situated in the space that science defines . . ."³

Foucault suggests that the modern founders of discursivity are *sui generis*, but his characterization of them and their followers evokes an older scholastic tradition in which quarrels about doctrinal issues in matters of religious belief were adjudicated by an appeal to the church fathers. Freud and Marx both would have found this comparison with scholasticism repugnant, since they considered themselves scientists; they would have declared their affinities with Newton and Galileo.

But Foucault is nevertheless right in his sense of how Freud has played in modern culture—that is, in his characterization of Freudianism rather than Freud.

Freud and Marx have been the idols of our secular culture so we should not be surprised that they provoke iconoclasm, especially in disillusioned idolaters. Crews enacts the role of idol smasher. There is of course an alternative to idolatry on the one hand and iconoclasm on the other: the demotion of the idol to a body of knowledge or knowledge claims, which we may both consult and criticize. We do not need to destroy Marx and Freud, we need only place them with thinkers like Weber and Durkheim, for example, whose texts for all their authority and power are not the final court of appeal.

A persuasive criticism of Freud's work must acknowledge its power. He has been read by educated readers who do not or cannot read science—that is, who do not follow the rules of testing truth claims that scientists are supposed to follow. Freud has entered so deeply into our cultural life that his thought has affected even those who have not read him. It does not of course follow from this fact that his influence has been benign. But an attack that simply tries to dispose of Freud's credibility as a scientist has not accounted for his persuasiveness.

Freud and Literature

We read Freud's work for its heuristic rather than probative value, its suggestiveness, not its proof. Grünbaum himself makes this distinction, acknowledging Freud's heuristic power, while asserting the inadequacy of validation in clinical studies. Indeed, it would be hard to understand why Grünbaum would devote so much of his career to the testing and challenging of Freud's work, if it weren't for its extraordinary suggestiveness. Heuristics is the domain of speculative theory, about whose truth value we may not be certain. Speculative theory is the space of potential truths, unproven, perhaps even insusceptible of proof. Imagine the impoverishment of our intellectual life if the intellect felt constrained from uttering what it could not prove scientifically.

Of course, the argument that speculation *might*

be true is weak. The case for Freud can hardly rest on it. If Freud's propositions do not or cannot satisfy the canons of scientific proof, they must satisfy some other standard to become persuasive. This standard, which Freud provides, is connected with the power of narration. In Freud, narrative and theoretical argument are sometimes indistinguishable. A notable example is his exposition of the Oedipus complex in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Freud finds his theory, so to speak, in stories and the basic structure of the Oedipus complex in the narrative structure of the Greek legend.

The Oedipus complex is the psychological inhibition of the acted out narrative of Oedipus's murder of his father and marriage to his mother. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud goes back to the legend of King Oedipus and tells it as the story of all males, who are "destined to direct [their] first sexual impulses toward [their] mothers, and [their] first impulses of hatred and violence toward [their] fathers."⁴ He notes that the action of Sophocles's play "consists simply in the disclosure, approached step-by-step and artistically delayed (. . . comparable to the work of psychoanalysis)." Freud's own interpretation is artistically delayed, withholding until the end the piece of evidence within the Sophoclean text that apparently reveals a proleptic awareness of the Freudian discovery.

In the very text of Sophocles' tragedy there is an unmistakable reference to the fact that the Oedipus legend had its source in dream-material of immemorial antiquity, the content of which was the painful disturbance of the child's relations to its parents caused by the first impulses of sexuality. Jocasta comforts Oedipus . . . : "For many a man hath seen himself in dreams His mother's mate, but he who gives no heed To suchlike matters bears the easier life." The dream of having sexual intercourse with one's mother was as common then as it is today with many people, who tell it with indignation and astonishment. As may well be imagined, it is the key to the tragedy and the complement to the dream of the death of the father.

Freud acknowledges that the story can be understood as a conflict between "the all powerful will of the gods and the vain efforts of human

beings threatened with human disaster." The moral of this version of the story is "resignation to the divine will." Freud's narrative gives us both his version of the Oedipus story and the Sophoclean version by explaining the play as a displacement from family drama to theology. Jocasta's speech not only reveals an awareness of the Oedipal drama, it is also a counsel of repression in consciousness, exactly what Freud wishes to overcome. From a Freudian point of view, the paradox of Sophocles's play is that it at once acts out the Oedipal drama and represses or sublimates it in a story of theological conflict between will and fate.

How does Freud "prove" his theory? Not as a scientist who presents the evidence of experiments and statistical information, but as a storyteller. His criterion for the truth of the Oedipus complex is its persuasive emotional power, its capacity to stir a response in the audience. "If the *Oedipus Rex* is capable of moving a modern reader or playgoer no less powerfully than it moved the contemporary Greeks, the only possible explanation is that the effect of the Greek tragedy does not depend upon the conflict between fate and human will, but upon the peculiar nature of the material by which this conflict is revealed." We are *moved* to accept the truth of the Oedipus complex in the way we are moved by the tragedy of *Oedipus Rex*. The criterion is much the same as the one that determines truth in a psychoanalysis: the emotional recognition of the truth of an interpretation. It is, need I add, what determines the reader's or listener's sense of truth in narrative. This authority of emotional response, common to psychoanalytic theory and practice and to narrative, is different from the authority of the truth claims in science, which have nothing to do with their emotionally persuasive power.

But Freud doesn't say that the ancient Greek audience was not moved by the conflict between fate and human will, so perhaps he should not be so confident in his universalizing claim that the tragic effect does not depend upon their (or our) recognition of this conflict. Nor does he provide evidence that it is the incestuous material that stirs the audience (the whole audience? a portion of it? both men and

women?). Moreover, persuasiveness is no guarantee of truth, since myths can at the same time persuade and deceive.

I'm not sure that skepticism of this kind can ever be overcome. Freud provokes it because his narrative is in the service of a claim to science. But such skepticism would seem captious if it were applied to the great masters of modern literature, who tell comparable stories. Readers are moved by their narratives and testify to a sense of their truth.

Freud's achievement occurs in the company of the great masters of modern literature: Conrad, Lawrence, Mann, and Proust. He is the theoretical formulator of ideas that are discursively or dramatically present in the work of these writers. It is not simply a matter of influence. Conrad was not influenced by Freud in his writing of *Heart of Darkness*. In fact, he had little regard for Freud's work. Lawrence began writing *Sons and Lovers* before he knew anything of Freud and only heightened the Oedipal pattern already in his work after he learned about Freud. Subsequently, he became a critic of Freud's theory. Mann of course was an admirer. What matters is not that Freud influenced or was influenced by these writers, but that they seemed to have arrived at Freud's insights independently.

Most psychoanalytic literary critics use Freudian ideas as a master text to interpret other texts, provoking suspicions among the unconverted that a model of interpretation is being arbitrarily and coercively imposed, much like the psychoanalyst's imposition of his understanding on the experience of patients. And the literary critic is more culpable than the psychoanalyst because the literary critic does not have the excuse of dealing with a living patient who can at least resist an interpretation. The more fruitful and persuasive "use" of Freud is what Peter Brooks does, for example, in placing the Freudian narrative, *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*, alongside other modern narratives.⁵

The moderns may not have discovered repression, but they display an exacerbated consciousness of it in the wake of what is experienced as its long Victorian history. The

whole panoply of Freudian concepts—the Oedipal drama in the family romance, the degraded split sexuality that results in impotence, the return of the repressed, and so on—are confirmed in the imaginative literature of the modern period. "Confirmation" in this sense is not scientific proof. If repression is the central fact of modern civilization, perhaps its very definition, then the work of literature in its most serious and ambitious version is to reveal the truth of what is repressed. Freud "theorizes" what may be the critical insight of modern literature. His theory can be construed as a narrative of the manifold sublimations of unconscious life in the thoughts, dreams, and behavior of persons.

Freudian Therapy

But a defense of Freud cannot confine him to modern literature. In his role as therapist or secular priest, questions about Freud's moral as well as epistemological authority arise. As a narrator of the repressions and sublimations of individual lives and the collective life of civilization, Freud is obliged to sort out self-betraying and defeating lies against the truth of unconscious life and the necessary illusions that protect us against its destructive impact.

Freud speaks of the "tact and restraint" necessary to a psychoanalyst "whenever in the course of his work he goes beyond the standard lines of interpretation, [for] his listeners or readers will only follow him as far as their own familiarity with analytic technique will allow them." He urges the analyst "to guard against the risk that an increased display of acumen on his part may be accompanied by a diminution in the certainty and trustworthiness of his results."⁶ What is required is a balance of caution and boldness. Freud here seems to be addressing both the psychoanalytic theorist who must convince his readers of the truth of his theory and the psychoanalyst who needs to elicit assent to his interpretations from his patients. It is not altogether clear whether Freud means to give advice about rhetorical strategy and tactics or whether he is expressing the self-doubt that accompanies the formulation of new theory and interpretation. Perhaps he is

doing both at once. The evolution of Freud's theory shows him to be fully aware that his ideas are always susceptible to falsification. "It remains for the future to decide whether there is more delusion in my theory than I should like to admit," he remarks apropos of his case history of the psychotic Doctor Schreber. But it would be wrong to conclude from Freud's cautionary remarks that he solves the problem of authority in the psychoanalytic situation. Unlike contemporaries who wrote fiction, Freud never adopted the position of epistemological relativism. "Point of view" is never his problem. He acknowledged the fact that his own knowledge of unconscious life was incomplete and that psychoanalysts were always in the process of learning more about their patients, but the unchallenged assumption of the relationship between analyst and analysand is the reliability of the knowledge of the analyst and the unreliability of that of the analysand, whose epistemological condition is one of false consciousness.

Like Marx, Freud has been read as a critic of false consciousness, a demystifier of self-defeating illusions. Both thinkers write as if they are in possession of a truth unavailable to others and as if resistance to that truth is paradoxically a confirmation of it. Resistance, according to this view, reflects an unconscious experience of the truth as a threat.

In "Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria," Freud succinctly formulates the principle that resistance confirms the truth of what is being denied.

My expectations were by no means disappointed when this explanation of mine was met by Dora with a most emphatic negative. The "No" uttered by a patient after a repressed thought has been presented to his conscious perception for the first time does no more than register the existence of a repression and its severity; it acts, as it were as a gauge of the repression's strength. If this "No," instead of being regarded as the expression of an impartial judgment (of which, indeed, the patient is incapable), is ignored, and if work is continued, the first evidence soon begins to appear that in such a case "No" signifies the desired "Yes."⁷

Freud makes his case through a sleight of phrasing: "the 'No' uttered by a patient after a re-

pressed thought has been presented" excludes the possibility that a "No" has been uttered without a repressed thought. It is reasonable to assume that if a repressed thought has been presented to consciousness that the "No" reflects resistance to it. But for Freud a "No" unrelated to repression is a (theoretical?) impossibility. Because the patient is always the victim of repression, he or she is incapable of impartial judgment. The implication is that neurosis infects the whole person. Freud does not have to demonstrate in each particular instance that a "No" is really a "Yes" by examining the evidence and offering criteria for judgment.⁸ It is not hard to see the moral objection to such a view. In its systematic and imperial version, the demystification can never be wrong, which makes it a tyrannical exercise. In its weaker version, resistance *may* (or may not) be a confirmation of the truth that is being resisted.

Freud betrays his own commitment to the strong view in the metaphor he employs to describe what is required for the analyst to overcome the analysand's resistance.

The length of the road over which an analysis must travel with the patient, and the quantity of material which must be mastered on the way, are of no importance in comparison with the resistance which is met with in the course of the work, and are only of importance at all insofar as they are necessarily proportional to the resistance. The situation is the same as when today an enemy army needs weeks and months to make its way across a stretch of country which in times of peace was traversed by an express train in a few hours and which only a short time before had been passed over by the defending army in a few days.⁹

This of course is the language of power, not reason. Resistance, Freud seems to say, is an irrational function, not susceptible to rational persuasion. Psychoanalytic interpretation is not an exercise in reasoning with a person, but rather a battle in which the analyst opportunistically seizes upon his adversary's vulnerabilities.

Perhaps nothing provokes more resistance to Freud than the doctrine of resistance. (It is interesting how often a reader's relation to theory replicates the analysand's relation to the

analyst.) Psychoanalysis assumes that we do not know our own interests and need to be brought to an awareness of them through the instrumentality of a knowing agent (the psychoanalyst). Coerciveness is always present or possible when the powers of self-awareness are thus delegated to someone else. Ideally, the psychoanalyst is no more than a catalyst who makes the reaction possible without entering into or distorting it. But the case histories of Freud and others tell us otherwise and the reason is simple: an analyst is a human being with all the limitations and distortions of his finitude, which can never be fully neutralized. The potentiality for tyranny lies in the asymmetry of authority between analyst and analysand. Lacan tried to equalize the relationship by reinventing the figure of the analyst as a suffering human being. But it is difficult to see how this solves the problem of authority since the suffering analyst in his specialized knowledge still claims access to the truth of which the analysand is ignorant. Of course, the problem of the asymmetry of relationships is pervasive in human life: between parents and children, husbands and wives, lovers, and even friends. The problem is exacerbated, however, when the asymmetry is institutionalized and sanctioned.

For the most part, modern writers do not share Freud's confidence. They may unmask the deceptions and self-deceptions of characters, but they are uncertain about what exists underneath. John Dowell, Ford Madox Ford's narrator, repeatedly testifies to his ignorance of character (including his own) in *The Good Soldier*. The truth of character is indeterminate. The conception of the unconscious as inchoate and ultimately unfathomable might have led Freud to a similar view: sometimes he even seems to hold it. But as the hero-narrator of his case histories, he assumes the privilege of certainty that distinguishes him from most of his modern contemporaries. Freud's confidence derives from a role that he unconsciously played (and which every psychoanalyst inevitably performs): that of a priest, a confessor to the secular minded, to those without religion who nevertheless require its benefits. One might imagine Freud's emphatic "No" to this

interpretation, given his view of religion as an illusion, but the need to be heard, judged, and consoled by a wise, spiritually endowed person may be incorrigible.

In a time of doctrinal skepticism and democratic suspicion, Freud's confidence in his own intellectual and moral authority is bound to be suspect. The suspicion is only exacerbated by alleged instances of Freud's reprehensible conduct in his professional and personal life. But the problem of authority in Freud reflects a confusion about the status of his thought. Interpretation is not scientific explanation, and it always implies the possibility of competing interpretations. Freud's great contribution to psychology was in establishing and enriching the interpretive mode in its attempt to discover the hidden motives of thoughts, dreams, behavior. Psychoanalysis then, like literary criticism, may be a fruitful conflict of interpretations. Freud and his followers are most vulnerable, it would seem, when they attribute to a particular interpretation, rather than the activity of interpretation itself, an authority it has not earned. Moreover, one can quarrel with the interpretive mode as an exclusive means of understanding personality, thoughts, feelings, behavior, because of its unwillingness to accept anything on its own terms, on its face value. Interpretation seems always to involve reduction or demystification.

There is a qualification or check to the psychoanalyst's claim to authority: the confirming response of the analysand. The debate about where authority lies in psychoanalytic practice has been generated by what seems to me a false polarity. Habermas says the analysand, Grünbaum the analyst. These opposing views are half-right and half-wrong. Analysands lack authority in the sense that they may not know their own motives; for an interpretation to work, however, it needs an analysand's confirmation. Authority ideally is a transaction between analyst and patient. The analyst anticipates the patient in knowledge, the patient must give assent to what the analyst knows.

Freud and Marx

Despite its potential for authoritarianism and coerciveness, the Freudian project maintains a

respect for the person in his or her individuality as the Marxian project does not. For Marx the truth of a person lies not in his individuality but in his class character, of which he may not be conscious. Harold Rosenberg points out that "class [for Marx] has character and individual physiognomy: the individual, independently of class, has neither. The material relations in which individuals have existed until now have never permitted the human being to be himself.

. . . The class is identical with that in the life of the individual which prevents him from being an individual. . . . The class is inescapably present to the individual as another self—it is the reality of his unreality."¹⁰ Though Marx clearly views class as a self-alienating phenomenon, and clearly believes in a transcendence through which the individual will achieve substantial being and genuine freedom, the effect of the Marxian conception of individuals in a class society (the society we know) is imperiously to deny their existence and to disallow their voice, except in their relation to class.

Proceeding from other premises, Freud regards each individual as unique (not the same as unitary or coherent). The truth of his or her individuality whether in conscious or unconscious life is an individual truth. Freud, as we know, rejected the Jungian idea of a collective unconscious. The evidence for psychoanalytic discovery is to be found not in statistical averages (the typical person or the "abstract individual"), but in case histories of particular persons and their individual behavior, dreams, thoughts, and feelings. The difference is momentous for understanding and self-understanding.

In the Marxist view, the self comes to serve its class interest, which is conflated with its personal interest; in the Freudian view, the person must learn to extricate his or her personal interests from whatever alienates them in familial and social existence. The Freudian view that the person, not the collectivity of class, has primacy makes it ultimately inimical to a Marxist regime, a dangerous example of bourgeois thought and practice. Thus the clinical situation gives complete freedom to analysands to express themselves. "The true

technique of psychoanalysis requires the physician to suppress his curiosity and leaves the patient complete freedom in choosing the order in which topics succeed each other during the treatment."¹¹ Though he may be directed to an understanding of himself that he did not intend, he never becomes a mere figure in an ideological drama.

The patient is given freedom, but he is "free" to choose only what his unconscious dictates. If neurosis is the human condition, as Freud sometimes asserts, persons come to be seen as victims of psychic forces over which they have no control. The possibility of redemption lies in a collaboration between the acumen of the psychoanalytic interpreter and the willing susceptibility of the patient. The case histories provide us with portraits of human beings whose thoughts, feelings, and behavior are reducible to neuroses. Dora, we are told, is lively and intelligent, but what we see of her is nothing more than the manifestations of a neurotic condition. Freud would seem to be something of a caricaturist of the psychic life. Here caricature need not have a pejorative meaning: it can refer to the exaggerations of certain features of psychological behavior so that they can be studied and understood and the patient cured of neurosis.

It would, however, be a mistake to reduce Freud's achievement as a creator of character to the case histories. There is another category of human being that Freud evokes, the hero who has not submitted his psychic powers to some superior(?) being. Sublimations now are not self-defeating symptoms but productive transformations of the libidinal energies of unconscious life. Michelangelo's Moses, as Freud construes him, is a splendid instance of the transformation of libidinal energy.

[Michelangelo] has modified the theme of the broken Tables; he does not let Moses break them in his wrath, but makes him be influenced by the danger that they will be broken and calm that wrath, or at any rate prevent it from becoming an act. In this way he has added something new and

more than human to the figure of Moses, so that the giant frame with its tremendous physical power becomes only a concrete expression of the highest mental achievement that is possible in a man, that of struggling successfully against an inward passion for the sake of a cause to which he has devoted himself.¹²

Sublimation is the generative force of Freud's own symbolic imagination, as in his envisaging of the human world as a struggle between Thanatos and Eros. The figures and tropes of Freudian theoretical analysis constitute—they do not demystify—the world. Freud, the narrative artist, elaborates reality rather than simplifying it through reduction. The truth of persons is double for Freud: their inchoate libidinal energy and their constitutive sublimating capacity that Freud himself had in abundance. Freud's characterization of Moses is probably closer to a self-portrait than it is to what Michelangelo intended.

I have not tried to absolve Freud of the charge of reductionism: there is a reductionist tendency in his work, but this is not the whole story. There is also another tendency in which the will shows itself to be an indestructible faculty that guarantees the self and works invisibly to reconstruct it, sometimes in

collaboration with a psychoanalyst and at other times heroically by itself.

I have tried to explain the revisionist attack on Freud as an iconoclastic reaction against his iconic status in modern culture and suggest a view of his work that avoids idolatry and iconoclasm. What I have not done is explain why and how Freud achieved his unique authority in modern culture. Why Freud and not Weber, Durkheim, or Tocqueville? Here is a speculation: Freud identified himself with Oedipus, who solved the riddle of the sphinx. In exploring the unconscious and its relation to conscious life, he thought he was defining the nature of man, and, to the extent that he succeeded—which is to say, to the extent that we recognize ourselves in the account that he provides, Freud must be the commanding figure of our culture in a way that Weber and Durkheim are not. Their achievements, great as they are, don't have a comparable ambition. So my earlier suggestion that Freud be demoted to a body of knowledge that includes Weber and Durkheim need not imply that one cannot distinguish his cultural status from theirs. It does mean, however, that like Weber or Durkheim or any figure in the history of culture, he should not be the ultimate arbiter of his own work. □

Notes

¹ See Frederick Crews, "The Unknown Freud," in the *New York Review of Books* (Nov. 18, 1993), pp. 53–66 and Paul Gray, "The Assault on Freud," in *Time* (Nov. 29, 1993), pp. 47–51.

² Crews, "The Unknown Freud," p. 56.

³ "What is an Author?" in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

⁴ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, edited by A.A. Brill (New York: Modern Library, 1938), p. 308.

⁵ See Peter Brooks, *Reading For the Plot*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Three Case Histories: The "Wolf Man," The "Rat Man" and The Psychotic Doctor Schreber* (New York: Collier Books, 1963), p. 112.

⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (New York: Collier Books, 1969), p. 76.

⁸ "According to psychoanalytical theory, I told him, every fear corresponded to a former wish which was now repressed; we were therefore obliged to believe the exact opposite of what he had asserted." Freud, *Three Case Histories*, p. 24.

⁹ Freud, *Three Case Histories*, p. 167.

¹⁰ Harold Rosenberg, *Act and Actor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 16.

¹¹ Freud, *Three Case Histories*, p. 19.

¹² Sigmund Freud, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works* (24 vols.), edited and translated by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–1994; New York: Macmillan), 13:233.

COMMUNIST BREAKDOWN, SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARALYSIS

Logically one should have expected that the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and its satellites would liberate ideas of democratic control of our economic destiny from the onus of association with the militarized despotism that the Soviets called “really existing socialism.” In fact the opposite has happened. Ideas of socialism even in its broadest sense of public control of economic activity have never been in such disrepute.

Why have things turned out like this? There are numerous recent developments that might contribute to an answer, both direct and indirect. By the direct discrediting of socialism and socialistic policies I have in mind two possible elements—naïve or deliberate misrepresentation of the Soviet debacle by promoters of private business, and self-defeating misunderstanding by socialists and social democrats themselves of the communist system and the alternatives to it. The indirect factors range from the globalization of economics and social change in the advanced countries to the inner dessication of most social democratic movements and what I might call the 1968 effect on the politics of the left.

The system that broke down in the Soviet Union and its European satellites between 1985 and 1991 is almost universally misinterpreted as a “utopian experiment” that finally “failed,” thereby disproving the socialist theory that had presumably animated it all along. This is to take Soviet propaganda at face value, even though it is repudiated rather than embraced. Ideology in the Soviet Union, far from guiding the country toward utopia, was reduced by Stalin’s time to the instrumental

role that Marx and Engels ascribed to the “false consciousness” of free-market ideology, a “bourgeois illusion of the eternity and the finality of capitalist production.”

The post-Stalin regime was the outcome of a long and painful evolution that profoundly changed the character of the system, from the fanatical dreams of proletarian revolution to a militarized, bureaucratic, and ultimately stodgy despotism. This transformation was masked, however, by continuity in the rule of the Communist party and its Marxist-Leninist ideology. Ideology thus provided internal self-justification at the same time that it attracted external support through its claims to represent socialism and anti-imperialism. An ossified and falsified postrevolutionary regime, hobbled by economic stagnation and interethnic tensions, was the actual system that came to grief as soon as a more enlightened generation of leaders tried to reform it.

Yet so powerful was the identification of communism and social change in the outside world, in the minds both of adherents and enemies of socialism, that the collapse of the Muscovite empire appeared to be an epochal failure of socialist principles, and of Marxism in particular. This is especially ironic because Marxism in any meaningful sense had not guided the Soviet leaders for fifty or sixty years—all the real Marxists were shot in the purges—and objectively considered the theory never did explain the Soviet phenomenon. If the Stalinist and post-Stalinist system can be called socialist at all, it was barracks socialism—not the rule of the workers, but a

terroristic and bureaucratic state exaggerating the worst of Russian tradition in order to build military-industrial power as an end in itself.

Certainly the discomfiture of the Western and third world lefts in the face of the Soviet collapse has been assiduously exploited by apologists for unfettered capitalism and the free market, who argue against history that capitalism always promotes democracy and that socialism must lead to dictatorship (though dictatorships have, to be sure, sometimes instituted what they called socialism). Communism's demise might not have been so disorienting had it not been for the turn of policy adopted by many of the successor governments themselves, notably by Boris Yeltsin in Russia. As I have noted before in these pages ("The Riddle of Russian Reform," *Dissent*, Fall 1993, and "The Revenge of Russian Political Culture," *Dissent*, Winter 1994), Russia's postcommunist choice was the result of a peculiar sequence of political developments, after President Mikhail Gorbachev found himself caught between the communist Old Guard and his personal rival Boris Yeltsin. Simply put, the latter embraced the utopian free-market perspective offered by his Western-oriented advisers as a weapon in his campaign to destroy his chief. Then this new Russian line, the product of Western economic theory, was seized upon by the same Western theorists as evidence that socialism was a failure. Whether the new Russian experiment will succeed remains for history to judge, but up to now it has failed disastrously, in a morass of inflation, impoverishment, corruption, and crime, convincing a majority of the Russian public that life was better and safer under the communists.

Great new hopes have naturally sprung up in the West for profitable business relationships with the former communist countries, both as markets and as investment opportunities. These interests have figured prominently in the aid programs of Western governments and international lending agencies, and in their endorsement of Yeltsin's questionable democracy. Yet it is difficult to conceive of Western enthusiasm for the free-market alternative to socialism as a mere ploy to embarrass the left and smooth the way for business.

Most Western political and economic leaders truly believe in their own form of false consciousness, that is, the free-market ideology as legitimation for corporate power. It was the coincidental demise of communism and its replacement by an ostensibly free-market regime that simply encouraged them to trumpet more loudly the eternal triumph of capitalism.

The more surprising reaction to events in the East has been that of Western socialists and social democrats. Rather than question the lessons wrongly drawn from the Soviet experience, they have tried to dissociate themselves from it by retreating from their own principles. One random response is that of a former leftist, not especially expert in Soviet matters, Professor Eugene Genovese, who writes in *The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism*: "With the disintegration of the Soviet Union the Left has suffered a political and moral Waterloo" that "drowned the hopes of socialists." The Western left has done little to make common cause with the much-neglected Russian centrists, the people who could have become the democratic alternative both to Yeltsin's free-market authoritarianism and to the communist-nationalist nostalgics. In Germany the social democrats notably failed to challenge the disastrous policies of the Kohl government to merge East Germany legally and economically into the West, at the price of great material and psychological damage and a drain on western taxpayers. This default of Western reformists in the face of a unique political opportunity to promote a "third way" leads us to the indirect factors in the flabby responses of the Western left, factors that have merely been accentuated by the collapse of communism.

First of all, as numerous recent analyses have shown, the classic program of social democracy—or in the United States, of liberal Democrats—has been undercut by the evolution of the world economy. With the incorporation of the third world into the worldwide manufacturing and trading system, we are witnessing a new kind of imperialism, advanced not by armies but by multinational corporations and spearheaded by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. First world capital moves overseas to exploit

third world labor as well as resources, and by mobilizing a global "reserve army of the unemployed" it depresses first world wages (in the United States) or drives up unemployment (in Europe). The national state, traditional protector of wage earners in the first world, attempts to compensate for its weakness by supporting movements of regional unity and free trade, only to undermine its own role further. Control of inflation and deficits supersedes full employment and social welfare as the immediate policy imperative even of social democratic governments (or the Democrats in the United States).

Meanwhile the societies of the first world have been changing in ways undreamed of by the traditional left. The decline of the industrial sector in favor of services and information and the undermining of trade union movements have been clear trends for a generation. In the United States what is left of the industrial working class is increasingly made up of members of racial minorities, and this fact unfortunately drives a wedge into class solidarity that is accentuated by the public cost of supporting an unproductive "underclass." If there is any sense of class struggle left in the United States, it is not between the workers and the bosses, but between the middle class (now understood to include all wage earners) on the one hand, and the "underclass" of welfare clients, criminals, and socially disintegrating ghetto populations on the other. The shift to a society of meritocracy within large organizations, public or private, seems to promote atomistic self-interest and careerism rather than any collective spirit of resistance to the power structure. Thus, the salariat is more sensitive to inflation and taxes than to industrial democracy and redistributive economics. Along with all these shifts, the culture of mass media puts a premium on entertainment and sensationalism, making it increasingly difficult to reach what remains of the natural constituency of the left and persuade it to support leaders and policies representing their own interests.

In the face of these frustrating trends the social democratic movement around the world has become tired and dispirited. Including the New Deal and its Great Society epigones in America, the democratic left achieved varying degrees of its agenda in the welfare state, labor

laws, business regulation, and consumer protection. In Western Europe the immediate aftermath of World War II witnessed the beginnings of a real revolution by ballot—under Labour in England, under socialist-communist-left-Catholic coalitions elsewhere—to advance the traditional socialist program of nationalizing the commanding heights of the economy as well as instituting an advanced welfare state. But the cold war put the brakes on these ventures, thanks to the split in the left over allegiance to Moscow and to the anti-Soviet and antisocialist leadership of the United States (complete with CIA financing of right-wing parties), as it fell back from the reformism of the New Deal era. Meanwhile, social democratic successes in the first half of this century had taken the edge off class grievance and diluted the appeal of the left. Since the late 1940s the traditional social democratic program has advanced hardly at all, except for the catch-up played by the United States in the era of the Great Society.

Until the 1980s the European left and liberalism in the United States generally held onto their partial conquests, a situation that I term the "social-democratic compromise." However, repeatedly denied the magic 50 percent of the electorate, social democrats and American liberals have progressively given up trying to change the economic power structure, in their elusive search for the centrist voter and coalition partners. Now there is a hegemonic shift in what Western societies consider to be their achievable norms, exemplified by "New Democrats" in the United States, the British Labour party, and socialists all over continental Europe. The political mind is reverting more than a century to an era where privilege was considered the birthright of the fortunate and inequality the price of social efficiency. In this new climate, there is little resistance to new counteroffensives by right-leaning governments to undo the social democratic compromise with privatizations and welfare state cutbacks.

More recent events have added to the helplessness of the democratic left, above all the movements associated with the year 1968. At the time,

both in Europe and in the Americas, it seemed that the emergence of the New Left, looking to alienated social groups for its base (students, women, racial minorities), was changing politics permanently. In retrospect, the effect was to divide and weaken the forces of reform. In America, notably, the New Left repelled the white working class and in turn dismissed them as reactionaries, leaving the ground to the George Wallace movement and Reagan Democrats. Middle-class reformism, always alarmed by disorder and tax bills, found an outlet in ecology movements and the Greens, or in the formula "social liberal but fiscal conservative." The right amassed new ammunition to denigrate reform in all its guises.

The misinformed Western response to the collapse of communism was a reaction waiting for an excuse. Social changes and past political disappointments had built up the potential for a radical shift against the traditional left and its goals. Events in the East and the postcommunist embrace of pure capitalism were enough to trigger Western opinion into a paroxysm of antisocialist disgust. In turn, Easterners who may have had reservations about the new course were deprived of reference points in the West that might have sustained a less disruptive and ultimately more just path to post-communist reform. Even the reformed communists in such countries as Hungary and Poland are yielding to free-market orthodoxy.

Does this mean the indefinite shelving of the social democratic agenda and the unchallenged maceration of East European society by free-market fanatics? Nothing in life is that final, and in fact some countercurrents can be seen already. Most obvious is the practical failure of free-market economics in Russia. A political backlash has already become evident everywhere from Lithuania to East Germany, as the electorate turns back to the communists in their reformist variant. Free-market reform in Russia may be sustainable only by the imposition of authoritarian rule—the Pinochet scenario that Yeltsin has already shown he is capable of acting out. And a major contending alternative—the communist-nationalist forces, or a neofascist such as Vladimir Zhirinovskiy—could combine authoritarianism with repudiation of the free market and once again defy the

West; communism without Marx, as it were. If interpretation of the failure of communism is controversial, interpretation of the failure of its successor will be a donnybrook.

A second factor that may help destabilize global capitalism is the resistance of the third world to the role that has been chosen for it. With the export of capital and the shift from natural economy to wage labor, the third world has become the new proletariat in a class struggle among nations. As in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe, these conditions have been turning third world countries in a revolutionary direction, but in this case toward revolutions of a new anti-Western sort. Up to the 1970s these movements took the form of anti-Western but westernizing movements in former colonies or semicolonial countries, often with Moscow's inspiration. The more recent trend may be worse, from the Western point of view: anti-Western revolutions that are also anti-westernizing, under the leadership of fundamentalists and nativists. With the disappearance of communism as a model, there is nowhere else for the revolutionary third world to turn.

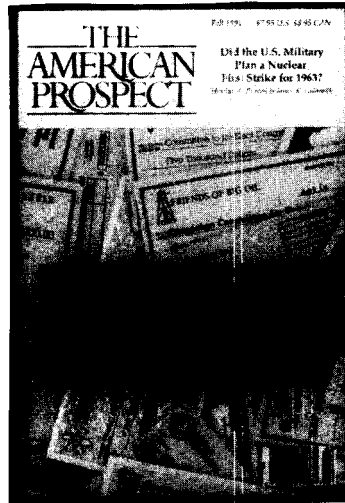
Finally, new forces for social change are bound to pick up strength in the West itself, though they may not necessarily work to the benefit of the traditional left any more than the movements of 1968 did. Although the Soviet Union no longer exists as a bogey to frighten people away from radical ideas, and though the "lesson" of the communist collapse will eventually wear off, new forms of radicalism in the West may exhibit their own kind of irrationalism. This has already been hinted at in extreme ecology movements, in the rejection of the Western cultural tradition by radical feminists and racial minorities, and in deeply antiscientific and antitechnological trends of thinking. We may find that the next Western revolution has more in common with third world fundamentalism than with the old labor and socialist movements.

This assessment does not mean giving up on a philosophy of reason and justice, but the road will not be easy. Drawing the wrong lessons from the communist debacle will not help. □

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Dissent

SIMPLE TRUTHS ABOUT THE POLITICS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment is not only an economic issue; it is also a political one. No government can afford to ignore it. A flourishing economy and ample jobs give governments legitimacy. They lose legitimacy if the economy stagnates and good jobs become scarce. Evidently, voters refuse to consider unemployment a necessary part of the social order or something governments can do nothing about. Politicians who do not bow—or seem to bow—to this public pressure risk losing their mandates.

Conservatives thus have to choose between political expediency and ideology. Their ideology leads them to believe that they cannot do better than the market. It makes them reject any suggestion that markets might malfunction. On the other hand, political expediency demands that they seem concerned about unemployment, seem, in fact, to be doing something about it. But there is an obvious way out of this dilemma. They can try to convince voters that unemployment is not caused by the autonomous forces of the market. They can claim that it exists and grows only because the market has been rendered imperfect by political interventions. Some conservative governments have indeed followed this strategy; and this reasoning has been sustained by the London *Economist*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and other similarly single-minded but prestigious publications. It even has found its way into the basic documents of international organizations and the pronouncements of summit conferences. We therefore have to deal with it. Would unemployment disappear in more perfect mar-

kets? Is it caused by too much government meddling?

However, markets might not solve the problem for the simple reason that people do not act only for economic reasons. Some aspects of human existence defy economic analysis—as for instance religion, war, and aesthetics. Similarly, goods and services are not always produced in exchange for wages. For instance, sexual satisfaction (of the noncommercial variety) or the nurturing of small children is usually provided without financial compensation. Even some of the riskier jobs, such as firefighting or soldiering, are often assumed because of social and moral obligations, with compensation taking a back seat. Finally, it is more normal for humans to be in motion than at rest. Whatever the fantasies of permanent *dolce far niente*, the truth is very different. Almost everybody needs to do something, otherwise life can seem like eternity. Wages, too, have more than an economic function. The level of remuneration structures society. It determines one's place in the social pecking order. Wages function as a sign of societal approval: high wages suggest high approval; low wages the opposite. Those without work are judged most harshly. Society informs them that they are considered useless. The negative effects of unemployment come less from the loss of revenue than from the impact that this highly visible judgment has on individuals. Unemployment benefits cannot compensate for it.

Paid work is therefore sought as a token of society's approval, as a means for integrating into society. Paid work is central to one's sense

of identity. The feeling that one is doing well in a job means more than the money income derived from the job. Economists beware: the labor market cannot be analyzed with the tools of marginal utility expressed in monetary terms. Not that this focus doesn't have use, but it also has limits. Wage differentials are often important precisely because of their noneconomic functions. Thus an unemployed worker might resent having to take a low-paid job not because it is low paid, but because it implies a lower station in life.

Options

Capitalism, to use an old fashioned term, is exceedingly flexible. Not only does it adjust to widely differing social systems, it also can succeed with different forms of compensation for work. Much has been said and written, for instance, about the economic consequences of a larger or a smaller public sector. But do these differences really affect economic performance and the level of employment?

If the public sector is small, nearly all compensation is given directly to the worker in the form of wages. If it is larger, a significant portion is given in the form of governmental transfers or services. There can be more ample old-age pensions, better public health care. A greater share of the goods and services consumed might be provided by public authorities. People make their choice. Instead of purchasing a swimming pool for their own backyard, they might prefer that their community build a public pool, using tax money. On the other hand, they might prefer to pay private school tuition instead of having their children attend free public schools.

Nations differ as to the choices they make. But the secular trend has gone in the direction of the public sector. Within the last hundred years, the "social state" has become firmly entrenched in North America and Europe. Even conservatives have been reluctant to tamper with its essentials, such as old-age pensions and unemployment insurance. Does this expansion of the public sector produce economic rigidities and dysfunctions?

In some cases this might be so. By and large,

however, the expansion of the public sector has had the opposite effect. Industrialists tend to understand that increasing personal security increases also the worker's flexibility and readiness to adapt to changing circumstances. Thus, in many cases, the "social state" has been created with the support of industrialists, and only against the opposition of such declining classes as shopkeepers, craftsmen, petty capitalists, and provincial dignitaries. Economic growth and the expansion of the public sector have gone hand in hand; the two trends supported one another. It would be very surprising if they were to become mutually exclusive in the future.

Still, it is claimed that unemployment results if too many citizens opt for public goods too frequently. The rising tax burden will depress the economy. There is no empirical evidence to support this claim. The World Bank has investigated this proposition and found no connection between economic growth and the level of taxation. And why should it be otherwise? Decaying roads and bridges, poor schools, crime-ridden streets—in short, the insufficient supply and quality of public goods—damage the economy. This damage is not compensated for by the readiness of citizens to profit from lower taxes and spend more on private consumption.

To sum up: the overall level of compensation for work does influence the economy. It will be adversely affected in the long run if too much is consumed and too little invested. Or, inversely, it might suffer in the short run if, because of insufficient wages, overall demand is depressed. Yet it matters very little how compensation is distributed to workers. It does not have an impact on the level of employment if, in addition to direct wages, a greater or smaller share is given via public goods or transfer payments. Cutting back on either of these is certainly no cure for unemployment.

Against unemployment, one patent cure is often proposed: that at the lower end of the wage spectrum, wages be further cut—a proposal often described as "wage flexibility," so as to obscure its brutality. At first sight, the

idea seems logical. The lower the price, the higher the demand for a good. The lower the wages, the larger the number of people employed. But there are objections. First, evidence is limited that this really will be the case. In its recent "employment outlook," the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) found no positive correlation between low labor standards (including low minimum wages) and rapid job creation. It is true that unemployment is relatively low in the United States—partly as a consequence of the creation of low paying service jobs. But it is equally true that unemployment is lower still in Japan, where the wage spread is limited and even the lower wages are relatively high.

In any case, and even if a few more jobs were created by a further depression of minimum wages, the long-term effects of such a strategy would be disastrous. The problems of the "working poor" would become insoluble. There would be fewer incentives to substitute capital for labor. The economy would be locked into a low growth pattern. Overall wealth would not increase very much, and it would be distributed still more unevenly.

Sufficient employment is dependent upon sufficient overall demand. If the economy modernizes and becomes more productive, fewer people can produce more. They can only do so, of course, if they find customers for the things they produce. But as most of us are never content with what is available, demand for additional goods and services is virtually unlimited. Even a highly productive economy should not encounter difficulties in finding customers. And being highly productive, it also could afford to pay high wages. So instead of opting for a low-productivity, low-wage economy, societies could also opt for a high-productivity, high-wage one.

This option is also attractive in view of its impact on external relations. Strong growth and high wages are only feasible with the application of modern technology. This has to be done on a broad scale. The competitive advantage of nations results less from the lower cost of their exported products than from the early introduction of new technologies. Success here spills over from the economic into the political and

cultural realms. Leading nations of the world (such as Great Britain in the nineteenth century and the United States in the twentieth) are also technological leaders.

What if demand growth is nonetheless insufficient to compensate for a rapidly growing productivity? What if fewer and fewer units of labor are required for the production of everything that is consumed and exported? Unemployment need not grow even then, provided that labor is shared. This can be achieved by lowering the age for retirement, extending schooling and vacation time, and cutting the number of hours worked. That, in fact, is what has happened in the past. Part of the growth in productivity was used not to increase wages but rather to cut down on work time. Thus the twelve-hour day was reduced to eight hours; later on came free Saturdays and the forty-hour week, and later still, annual vacations became longer. Yet in recent times there has been a slowdown or even a reversal of this trend; this has certainly contributed to unemployment.

A further essential condition for the success of the high-growth, high-wage option is abundant capital. The 1991–1993 world economic crisis not only depressed overall demand, it also made capital scarce and expensive. Capital was destroyed on a massive scale. The Japanese real estate and stock market bubble burst. In the United States, the precipitous decline of the real estate market came on top of the failure of many savings and loan associations. In addition, large debts outstanding to developing and formerly communist countries had to be written off. Vast amounts of capital were tied up both in speculation and as a hedge against it. As the depression increased the deficits in their budgets, governments also turned to the capital markets. With high demand and little supply, and in the absence of any effective governmental action, the price of capital rose.

Logic would dictate that this scarcity and high cost of capital be given due consideration when unemployment is discussed among the world economic powers. Yet, strangely enough, this is not the case. Instead, most studies concentrate on the so-called "struc-

tural” causes of unemployment. In this way, little attention is paid to the fact that the dysfunctional behavior of capital and money markets has discouraged productive investment and thus overall growth.

In the one-sidedness of the discussion, isn't there a hidden agenda? Two different strategies can be considered in the fight against unemployment. In one, labor is made cheap and abundant, and capital is kept scarce, thus increasing the rewards of capital and reducing the rewards of labor. The alternative is to rely on cheap and abundant capital while augmenting the gains of labor via higher pay and shorter work time. Invariably, the former strategy is chosen, although the latter has much to recommend it, especially as it implies the long-term increase of overall wealth.

Politics

Policy choices in the face of unemployment are political in their nature, rather than economic. Some of these choices are:

- How should potential work be distributed between the employed and the unemployed?
- How big should the nonworking population (supported by transfer payments) be?
- Should production be capital intensive or labor intensive?
- How should rewards be split between capital and labor?
- To what degree should inequalities in incomes be tolerated?
- How much of increased productivity should go into higher wages and how much into leisure time?

It is to be expected that economists, in defense of their turf, will object to this political approach. They will maintain that these are all allocative decisions, with very different economic consequences. And, therefore, these choices are preempted by quasi-eternal economic constraints. But the market economy can very well adapt to different social systems and politically determined settings. The market economy has been successful in rather poor countries with large in-

come differentials and low wages. It has also been successful in more egalitarian and wealthy societies. It succeeded when women were largely excluded from the labor market; and it succeeded when they were included. Markets were efficient in states with a large public sector and many regulations, as well as in places with minimal economic involvement of the state.

Does that mean that there are absolutely no economic constraints on such political choices? All choices are constrained. We must be aware, though, that political constraints often masquerade as economic ones. The level of interest rates can be taken as an example. I suggested above that rates be reduced so as to increase investment and speed economic transformation. But what if a country were to unilaterally lower interest rates? A massive flight of capital would follow. This option is therefore not available to any single national government. Its freedom to set interest rates is—so it seems—reduced or even annihilated by something that looks economic. But is that something really economic? Acting jointly, that is on a global level (in a way the International Monetary Fund was originally intended to), governments could decide on what would be an adequate remuneration of capital. Acting jointly, the major world economic players (let us say Japan, the United States, and Germany) could set the level of interest rates more or less at their pleasure.

Single nations no longer provide an adequate frame for a policy on interest rates. However, the fact that no single nation can effectively rule in this realm does not mean that rates are economically and not politically defined. It only means that those called upon to act do not act jointly. There is no effective international forum where joint policies can be established and implemented. But, in this case, the absence of politics is politics too.

Again, objections are to be expected from economists at this point. They will maintain that politicians are not at liberty to define the proper remuneration for capital. If the remuneration were set too low, the supply would dry up. Funny—the same thing is never argued with regard to labor. On the contrary, many

economists insist that lowering wages would increase the supply of labor.

Within reasonable bounds—that is, so long as it is positive—the level of real interest rates does not affect the supply of capital. The level of savings is independent of interest rates, much as the willingness to work is independent of wages.

This example should warn us against the claims of economists to explain the economy and their readiness to substitute themselves for politicians. They have been especially generous in offering their advice on unemployment—and they have done more harm than good. The basic decisions to be made are political. Obscuring this fact, economists have hindered effective action, diverting attention to side issues and sustaining hope in miracle cures. Reflecting on this, they should now give some

thought to their proper—and reduced—place and function in this debate.

On the other hand, politicians must be made to face their responsibilities. These are tough, not because remedies against unemployment are obscure, but because these remedies imply political decisions that will alter the way things are conventionally done and damage quite a few established interests. Dividing work, for instance, means lower pay for those already employed. Opting for high productivity puts the squeeze on sectors of low productivity (the famous-infamous Mcjobs); and finally, lowering the cost of capital would put politicians in conflict with the most powerful interest group of all. Economists should not play at politics. But neither should politicians hide behind economists and use economic argument as a pretext to avoid hard choices. □

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SOCIALISM AS A REGULATIVE IDEA: IRVING HOWE'S POLITICS

Irving Howe opened *A Margin of Hope*, his autobiography, by recalling a conversation in which Ignazio Silone asked him when he first became a socialist. "At the advanced age of fourteen," was Howe's reply. That would have been 1934, a year after Franklin Roosevelt became American president and Adolph Hitler became German chancellor, and two years before the Moscow trials began. It was in a world of depression, fascism, Stalinism, and global conflagration that Howe's politics first took shape. A great deal of his mature intellectual energy was devoted to understanding the fate of the left in those years.

The cardinal conclusion he reached was that any divorce of socialism from democracy violated socialism's animating spirit, the belief that ordinary men and women should and could have authority over their lives. And there was no greater violation than Stalinism, an unmitigated calamity for the left—not to mention for the inhabitants of the Soviet Union. Howe felt a special kinship for and rage about the fate of socialists who were victimized by communism; these were the democratic socialists who hoped for "a world more attractive," but who were consumed by regimes that legitimized terrifying brutality with the language of the left. In the decade in which I worked with him on *Dissent*, I often heard Howe comment about political cognitive dissonance and about the human capacity for moral rationalization. Sometimes he would muse grimly about it, but

finally I suppose he was resigned to it. He had, after all, spent years engaging intellectual gymnasts who, without skipping a beat, had dispensed "left-wing" justifications of dictatorships, only to turn neoconservative "on principle" later, usually as the country's mood shaded right. There was, of course, a certain consistency, for either way Howe's politics was an enemy.

Howe came to characterize those politics as "liberal socialist." Though he criticized, sharply and freely, liberalism's weaknesses from a left perspective, the reproaches were not dismissive; among the lessons he took from the 1930s—from the experience of Stalinism as well as from all forms of political sectarianism—was that socialism's egalitarian aspirations ought to be the fulfillment, not the negation, of liberalism, and that socialist politics needed to be imbued with a self-critical temper.

Another lesson was that the politics of the American left had to be American and to speak American. The language, mentality, and tenets of Russian revolutionism would never address adequately American conditions or articulate successfully the needs of American working people. This realization, and his assimilation of it, sustained Howe's own transition from a version of Trotskyist sectarianism to American democratic radicalism.

Because it was an American radical movement that he wanted, he found it a "bitter irony" that, as he wrote in *Socialism and America*, "the most promising approach of the American left, one that came closest to

This essay was originally presented in April 1994 to a conference on "Irving Howe and His World" at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

recognizing native realities, derives from the very movement that [had] done the most to discredit and besmirch the whole idea of the left." The approach was "Browderism," named after the American communist who, in the mid-1930s, at Moscow's behest, led the Communist party (CP) into popular front tactics within the framework of the New Deal and a burgeoning labor movement. Communism, it was then declared, was "twentieth century Americanism." This was, of course, a politics pursued in bad faith, a matter of positioning rather than a principled embrace of democratic pluralism; "twentieth century Americans" in the CP also defended the Moscow trials and, soon enough, were rationalizing the Stalin-Hitler pact.

Yet Browderism provided, in Howe's mind, a model, albeit an "ambiguous" one, for what a real democratic left-wing politics might look like. "What succeeded as a brilliant masquerade," he wrote four decades later, "might look rather different if undertaken out of democratic good will." A broad movement that spoke directly to America, a popular front in good faith, to press toward a society more and more democratic in all dimensions of life—for such a movement Howe yearned, even if his expectations remained sober.

There was, at the same time, a utopian philosophical architecture within Howe's politics. This may seem surprising. Howe was, after all, suspicious of too much philosophizing and was known for insisting that the left had to address directly what it would do in power and not simply divine a rosy but very hazy future. He spent considerable energy in the 1980s examining the work of people like Alec Nove, searching for a "feasible" socialism—a market socialism—that could be the basis of a left program for new times. A "feasible" politics, however, had also to project human possibilities.

Every so often I heard him describe socialism as the "regulative idea" of his politics. In his writings, this was generally articulated as a desire to sustain utopian thinking. But if there is such a thing as nuanced desire, such was

Howe's. On one hand, he insisted on the legitimacy of utopianism, on the validity of social imagination, in opposition to "curdled realism." His last article in *Dissent* (Spring 1993) proposed "Two Cheers for Utopia"—two, not three, yet genuine cheers nonetheless. His ire was often aimed at those—especially intellectuals—who "adjusted," who allowed themselves to become comfortable within their society. For Howe, the intellectual's task was critical—always.

On the other hand, he knew too well what utopians, possessed by a myth of revolutionary apocalypse, had brought about in this century. You will, perhaps, recall from Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* the figure of Naphta, the half-Jewish, Jesuit-trained fanatic who declares that "the proletariat has taken up the task of Gregory the Great, his religious zeal burns within it. . . . Its task is to strike terror into the world for the healing of the world, that man may finally achieve salvation and deliverance." It is commonly accepted that Naphta was modeled, at least in part, on Georg Lukács, Marxism's most formidable philosopher (and literary critic) in this century—a thinker whose aspiration to what he called "totality" led to his immersion in and debasement by Leninism and Stalinism. It was a profoundly tragic corruption for as Howe remarked in a somewhat (though not entirely) different context—a reflection on the collapse of the Soviet Union—there was, for many of its adherents, an "idealism—twisted, distorted, corrupted, yet idealism nonetheless—that went into the communist movement."

Tragedy and danger were entwined in Naphtas, whether in Eastern Europe or in City College alcoves. Howe, I think, came to suspect there was at least something of Naphta in a good many militants; the great disaster was if this grew within as they grew in years. The alternative, however, was not to become a Naphta of anticommunism, the persona of many a leftist turned neoconservative. Nor was it, for those who remained in some way on the left, to forsake any sense of possibility, of going "beyond the given." Social imagination remained precious to Howe, and this brings me back to socialism as a regulative idea.

The notion of a "regulative idea" has a history in epistemological debates in German idealist philosophy. This was decidedly not Irving Howe's preferred realm of discourse—such matters strained severely his famously limited patience—and I don't know that he consciously drew from it. While a brief, and greatly simplified, glance at a dimension of these debates may, at first, appear to be quite a detour from Howe's world, it will, I think, permit some insights into the lessons that might be drawn from the 1930s and demonstrate, despite his preferences, that there was indeed a philosophical architecture in Howe's thinking.

Kant argued that knowledge of the world is due to the organization of experience by the structure of our minds. Our "Understanding," in his scheme, is composed of categories (for example, quality, quantity, modality, temporality) that impose order on what our senses take in; our Reason regulates the Understanding's interaction with the empirical world, pressing it beyond what is given empirically, though what is beyond always remains beyond and we must always remember this. For instance, in scientific research, we proceed as if nature were "a unity," although we can never experience it as such and any effort to prove it to be a unity would be a delusion. Hegel, on the other hand, believed that history, writ large, is rational, and our own reason engages it. He thus famously criticized Kant on the grounds that it is misleading to speak of an archetypical intellect composed of tools standing opposite the world; you cannot learn to swim, he noted, without jumping in the water. Yet once swimming, you change, you learn your own powers and are thereby transformed.

My purpose here is not to pursue or evaluate the formidable arguments marshaled by Kant and Hegel. (I often find myself saying Yes and No to each of them at one and the same time.) Instead, I want to expropriate them and to translate them into the bases of two political orientations toward the world and utopianism. One doesn't assume utopia to be inscribed in reality, in Being, or in History. It only assumes a basic human need to strive beyond the given, to have an image of something qualitatively better by which to regulate that striving, to

regulate politics in the here and now. The other assumes that Reason is inscribed not just in the intellect, but in History itself, that utopia is implicit in the here and now; and that by immersing yourself in the river of History, you are on the way there.

The problem with the second position lies in certain suppositions: that the currents must, finally, flow in one direction; that you will never be shattered on rocks or ensnared in weeds, pulling you on another course or beneath the waves. It forgets that as you swim, you don't generally reflect on your body and its motions—that is, unless you somehow get caught, perhaps in undercurrents, and start drowning. Whereupon you recognize that your confidence in the long term needed modulating in light of the twists and turns of the short term.

In contrast, utopia as a regulative idea demands reflective distance along with principled engagement. The word "regulate" is essential for without it, politics, good or bad, is ever lost in the given, in the here and now. The short term must be linked to an image of the long term, even if you assume that the long term will not be attained, even if you assume that a great deal changes as you engage the world with it in mind, even if you are cognizant of the danger that the image may become a "fantasy of static perfection," as Howe and Lewis Coser put it in "Images of Socialism," the article they wrote together for the second issue of *Dissent* and that was, in many ways, the intellectual charter of the magazine. "Socialism is the name of our desire," they averred, echoing Tolstoy's "God is the name of my desire." Socialism was not "a controlling day-dream" but rather a vision that "gives urgency to . . . criticism of the human condition in our time. It is the name of our desire because the desire arises from a conflict with and an extension from the world that is."

Going beyond was indeed essential, for "a life without some glimmer of a redeeming future" is "a life cut off from the distinctively human." But part of being human was recognizing that "there is no total fulfillment," no end of history. Socialism is the name of our

desire but we shall not be as gods; we shall live in a world in which, even if we progress toward socialism, there will be "new problems, new conflicts, new questions." What socialism demanded, however, was a striving to rid the world of suffering that comes from material deprivation and political domination.

The words striving and imagination are constantly present in these formulations; socialism, utopia, for Howe, is an image and an image is something you keep before your eyes. But it is not something in which you are immersed. Immersion was the utopianism of totalitarianism, of Stalinists hankering to incarnate a "fantasy of static perfection" and calling it God. Howe rejected this Utopia of the Drowned, not on behalf of resignation but on behalf of a regulative idea of hope, a means by which to judge and thereby challenge the given. He closed his last *Dissent* article by citing the same passage by neo-Kantian philosopher Ernest Cassirer with which "Images of Socialism" ended:

A utopia is not a portrait of the real world or of the actual political or social order. It exists at no moment of time and at no point in space; it is "nowhere." But just such a conception of a nowhere has stood the test and proved its strength

in the development of the modern world. It follows from the nature and character of ethical thought that it can never condescend to accept the "given." The ethical world is never given; it is forever in the making.

This, commented Howe, was why he cheered twice for utopianism: it was "a necessity of moral imagination."

Another way of putting this might be as follows. For Stalinism, what was real (in the USSR) was moral and what was moral was real(ized in the USSR). There was no need to look beyond. For American intellectuals who traveled from left-wing anti-Stalinism to uncritical, often smug celebrations of the status quo, what was real was moral and what was moral was real in the United States (at least until the rise of the New Class, feminism, and similar perils). But for Irving Howe, what was moral was not yet realized; it was an image toward which, though never expecting its full achievement, one strived, by dint of being human. This was no matter of historical necessity but of humane imperative; essential was not nationalization of the means of production but, as he once put it, the "socialization of concern." □

To Our Contributors:

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(1) Be sure to keep a copy of your manuscript. And please remember that we can't return articles unless they're accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

(2) Please don't write to ask whether we're interested in such and such an article—it makes for useless correspondence. Look at our last few issues to see if your idea fits in. Or take a chance and send us your article. We will not consider manuscripts submitted simultaneously to several publications.

(3) Type your ms *double-spaced*, with *wide* margins. Check all your figures, dates, names, etc.—they're the author's responsibility. No dot matrix submissions, *please*. Use WordPerfect 5.1 if possible, and send us the disk. Please use inclusive language so that we don't have to make adjustments during editing.

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(5) We're usually quick in giving editorial decisions. If there's a delay, it's because a few editors are reading your article.

(6) Please bear with us—we have accumulated quite a backlog of material, and you may have to wait for a few issues before you see your article in print.

THE EDITORS □

Some Flowers

(for Irving Howe)

In a world where you are asleep with your fathers,
in that part of the forest where trees read,
your tree still reads to us. Tonight your branches bend over
Conrad, Trotsky, Saba,
the evergreen Irish.

Joyce hated flowers,
his wife put a house plant on his grave.
There are no socialist flowers,
yet the balmiest wind favors
a more even distribution of wealth.
Some have seen among the flowers religious orders,
proved a rose a Christian,
while of course they pruned away the Jew.

It is easier for me to believe flowers
know something about wages and hours,
a fair day's pay for a fair day's work in the sun,
than to believe in the resurrection of the flesh.

When you died, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers
of America published a public notice
of their mourning and sent flowers.
Your last sweet note that reached me after your death,
I left on the dashboard in a book,
the way they used to press dry flowers.
As I drove along in Canada,
it flew out of the window —
I thought it was a bill.

—STANLEY MOSS

CRITICAL REVISIONS

After a time of sickness and suffering, Irving Howe, in the year before his death, regained an animating interest in life. For a while, free of the grim paraphernalia of doctoring and hospitals, he gained shelter. His spirits revived, and he went back to work. His pleasure in anecdotes and jokes, in meditative conversations about literature returned, although there was a new kind of quiet in him and a strain of melancholy, the permanent memento of those who have spent months being taught pain and the body's helplessness.

He was not simply sad. After re-reading Proust that year, he spoke about *Remembrance of Things Past* with the artlessness and exuberance of a very young reader, one who had been away in a bleak country but who had returned now, and whose response to the writers he valued had stayed receptive, inquiring and fresh.

It is that freshness of vision—or re-visioning—that imparts such vigor and limpidity to his last book, *A Critic's Notebook*. Style and tone in fiction, academic novels and those he calls “punitive,” farce and the self, history and the novel, are some of its many subjects. Among the company he summons are Gogol, Dostoyevski, Dickens, Defoe, Tolstoy, Proust, Kundera, F. Scott Fitzgerald, George Eliot, Arnold Bennett, Virginia Woolf, Fielding, Sterne, D.H. Lawrence, Kipling, Gissing, Sir Walter Scott, Rousseau, and the evanescent “common reader.”

In his introduction, Irving's son, Nicholas, writes that his father characterized these essays and notes as *shtiklakh*, “from the Yiddish for ‘little pieces’ or ‘morsels.’” Yet each of these “little pieces” is the issue of decades of

reflection, and they echo larger themes of which they are, perhaps, the essence.

I speak of Irving's “last” book, meaning his final book. Yet as I read these pieces, I felt they held the promise of further revelation, just as the novels we have read and loved when we were young reveal new depths, new facets, when we return to them years later. These morsels spark and jump with news, with the flash of discovery.

Wit and rigor inform his observations on the making of literature in the sections titled “Characters: Are They Like People?”; “How Are Characters Conceived?”; and “Five Instances of Characterization,” where he engages with literary theorists, quoting one who referred to Jane Austen's Emma Wodehouse as “it.” I wondered if he had in mind the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset's aphorism, “People in a novel need not be like real ones. It is enough that they are possible.”

His generosity of mind is especially evident in these three essays. They are strongly reasoned but he was not a captive of the past. He was open to new seeing. Still, he knew that real people who read about characters in a novel become more real to themselves. As someone has said, the human mind only recognizes a feeling when it has words for it.

The function of literary criticism is not to rip novels out of their time and subject them to the withering dismissals of the upstart present. Everyone needs “historical imagination,” Irving writes, but, “the mere fact that we need to invoke it testifies to its difficulties.”

In a trenchant argument in “History and the Novel,” he analyzes these difficulties in a discussion of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, in which a moral dilemma arises when the

children of Sir Thomas Bertram begin an amateur theatrical project, a “morally dubious” endeavor, during the time Sir Thomas is visiting his estate in the West Indies worked by slaves. Can modern sensibility accommodate itself to such a lopsided moral imbalance, wonders Irving, and he concludes, “History makes, history unmakes the novel.” But he doubts that obsolescence awaits it as a genre, “since it is precisely the adaptability of the novel, its gift for quick changes in response to historical need, that should enable it to survive.”

Irving does not reject modernism or new notions of the study of literature. But he appears to me to share Ortega’s view that one of the implications of the word *modern* is that the pinnacle of possibility has been reached; the path is ended. And he does judge some of the new criticism as inexpungibly dreary, a skeletal hand restraining the eagerness of the “naive” reader.

Still, he is philosophical. He remarks, “Only those over 50 and a few undergraduates, I suspect, still love the novel,” though he reminds his readers in a discussion of writers of “anti-novel” novels (Robbe-Grillet, Grombrowicz, Barthelme, Kundera) that “the old nestles in the new—how else could either be defined?”

In “Characters Out of Characters,” there is an illuminating analysis of the master-servant theme, beginning with the plays of Plautus and taking in, along the way, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, Jim and Huck, Sam Weller, and Diderot’s *Jacques the Fatalist*, and pausing to note the way in which “American whites have delighted in plays about ‘rhythmic blacks’ while at the same time basking in the knowledge that tomorrow the natural blessings of tyranny will be reinstated.”

Irving knew that writers “really have no choice but to entangle themselves in the cultural-political disputes of the time . . . whatever their inclinations toward pure art.” Choice is irrelevant. We are social-political beings whether we wish to be or not. We weigh on the world’s scale.

Irving was certainly a political man but he was measured, and in a large sense civil, where

literature was concerned. In my own readings of his criticism over the years, I can’t recall when he ever yielded to the temptation to interpose himself or his political views between readers and novels and, so to speak, obliterate the novelists—as though reviewing were a clash of arms.

In his beautiful piece on Kipling’s *Kim*, he writes, “One great flaw in the reforming passion is that in its eagerness to remedy social wrongs it tends to neglect, certainly to undervalue, the experience of those whose lives it wishes to improve. It does not honor fully enough the life-hungers, the life-capacities of the oppressed. Now Kipling, it is true, did not see India as particularly oppressed, and I am as ready as the next liberal or radical to deplore this failure; but he did see the people of India as vigorous, full of humor and energy, deeply worthy. How are we to explain that in the pages of this apologist for imperialism, the masses of India seem more alive and autonomous than in the pages of writers claiming political correctness?”

He says about James Joyce that he was “not only a novelist but a *writer* for whom the play of language has a value apart from the rhythm of the story.” Irving himself was not only a critic but a writer, as readers of his *Notebook* will discover in essay after essay where the delight he took in language leaps from the page.

Whether he is discussing Sterne’s artifice or James’s stylized speech, Irving is mindful that a writer’s choice of words cannot be undone from the meaning they convey any more than notes of music can be severed from the composition they form. When emotion breaks upon the reader—or the listener—it is because, partly, of the singular way in which words—or notes—are associated.

There is more than that. Speaking from the viewpoint of a novelist and poet, the Italian Cesare Pavese said in his diary: “A work of art is successful only when, for the *artist himself*, it has a certain element of mystery.”

I believe Irving would have agreed with Pavese. In a graceful examination of Chek-

hov's short story "In the Cart," he talks of the "writer's spirit." Into this vague region, the most gifted and intrepid critic is not likely to venture. A story itself eludes final analysis. He writes, ". . . no matter how many things criticism can tell us about a work of literature—a good many—it may finally be unable to explain its essential quality."

Irving was an explorer. Following his thinking journeys, a reader can perceive the struggle, the stretch of his mind to attain stations of clarity, of understanding. In "Dickens: Three Notes," there are several pages on *Little Dorrit*. They begin quietly with a discussion of minor characters in the novel; they pause for an incisive summation of what has gone before, "Soullessness—that for Dickens is now more terrifying and familiar, the discovery of creatures formed in the image of man but operating as mere functions of the city," and quicken into this conclusion: "Let us say that Dostoevsky is a name we give to the glimpsed desires of the late Dickens."

In his reflections on the naturalistic novel, in particular the novels of Zola, Irving takes up the matter of taste, more often than not a red flag for anyone who has even the most remote interest in contemporary culture. He defines it as a distillation of "a culture's sentiments and norms." And the traditions of yesterday are challenged, always, by literary revolution. He poses the question: "How does that one word, 'taste,' contain . . . contradictory meanings—immutable discernments and momentary fashions?" He answers "It does . . . in the brilliantly perverse way language has of exhibiting ambiguities of thought." About Zola and the other writers whose work belongs to naturalism, he says, "Naturalism left a permanent mark upon the modern novel. It declared all experience to be the writer's province; it refused to accept barriers of taste that would ban the ugly and painful." For those of us who have lived long enough to experience the malaise induced by a change of era, his words are a corrective to the tendency to slide into angry regret for what is continually, if only partly, lost—yesterday and its fashions of thought and taste. Throughout the *Notebook*, Irving delivers other such little cuffs of

common sense, reminding us that the old and new are inextricably bound together.

I think of T.S. Eliot's response to a young poet who said to him, "The dead writers are remote from us because we know so much more than they did." Eliot replied: "Precisely, and they are what we know."

One of the most consistent elements in Irving's literary criticism was his effort to do justice to works with which he was not entirely in sympathy, even those repugnant to his own sensibilities. Many critics are scant, not so much in their praise (often cunningly insincere; one realizes only at the end of a review how much they have disliked a given work) but in genuine receptivity to the novels they judge. They seem impelled by an urgency to comment on something far more important than the content of a writer's work.

Irving wanted to comprehend, not to conquer. The light he casts upon individual writers broadens to illuminate such shadowy places in the territory of writing as the problem of the first-person narrative. He remarks that its weakness can be "a confinement of vision that results, so to say, in the world collapsing into the narrator's voice." This last is from "Obscurity in the Novel," and it bears upon the risk novelists run that the *I* of a story can become a phantom, a disembodied voice, not a character. Three novels are closely examined here: Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, James's *The Awkward Age*, and *The Good Soldier*, by Ford Madox Ford.

Irving writes, "So obscurity as an internal condition needs to be distinguished . . . from obscurity as an intended theme." But "where James's obscurity forms the very matter of perception, becoming thereby a lucid theme, lighting up the obscurity that inheres in the life of men and women," the other two novels, for all their interest and art, are murky at the center, that is, in the writers themselves.

Although my own, probably inordinate fondness for *The Good Soldier*, and my impatience with the ambiguities I found in *The Awkward Age*, were not substantially changed, my perception of them was enlarged by the acuity of Irving's insight.

"Saint Augustine confessed to God; Rous-

seau to a packed house," ushering in the modern age with "tumult and self-penetrating chaos," Irving says in "The Self in Literature." This piece can't yield up its essence in brief quotations. It is eloquent; it has the amplitude and intensity of a great burst of thought. It is invaluable in its analysis of the development of the idea of a self and the changes cultural and social forces have wrought upon that idea. One need only reflect upon the group self, so pervasive a phenomenon of contemporary life, a "self" that swallows all individual variation and difference, into a monolithic assertion of common grievance and resentment, to sense how elastic and fluctuating the very idea of self is.

In one of the "Five Comments" on Tolstoy, "The Russian Fly," there is such charm! Here, Irving's wry humor found a subject equal to it.

The fly, "a wretched little creature," buzzes "its way through some of the great Russian novels." Always respectful of ordinary life, Irving says, ". . . the fly is ingrained in common human experience, always the firmest basis for a literary symbol."

As I read "Tone in Fiction," the concluding essay in *A Critic's Notebook*, I thought of what Tolstoy wrote in his diary in 1903: "It's time to die and I'm still thinking up things."

In the last weeks of his life, Irving, too, was thinking up things. He escaped moribundity; he was a man, as it were, interrupted in mid-sentence.

At the end of an elegiac musing on Proust's great work, Irving speaks: "Art decays like life, and in the end there is only the dust of centuries."

And yet. □



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Steven Lukes

ONLY CONNECT

Richard Rorty's case for "prosecuting campaigns" ("Movements and Campaigns," *Dissent*, Winter 1995) rather than "defining movements" rests on a carefully built construction of superimposed oppositions: tactics versus strategy; focusing on "what is to be done here and now" rather than on the "significance of events"; concern with "what the strong are doing to the weak" rather than with "deep questions about the spirit of the age or about underlying causes of social and cultural change"; "fighting injustice" versus self-promotion in "intellectual or political circles"; pragmatism versus "fantasy"; reformism versus changing things "utterly"; plurality versus a pattern centered on a "single thing"; taking things "in one's stride" versus total identification, "self-purification," and "self-surrender"; seeing history as an "endless network of changing relationships" and a "process of random mutation" rather than as an "immanent teleology of maturation" leading to "a process of emancipation and enlightenment"; a "sense of the finite" rather than "a passion for the infinite."

But this construction is a house of cards. If you believe that these distinctions either coincide with or entail one another, then you will believe that to be concerned with wider issues of political strategy, the significance of events, and the deeper causes of social and cultural change is or leads to self-promotion, utopian fantasy, revolutionary radicalism, monism, religious or quasi-religious identification, and a passionate commitment to the exploded *grands récits* of the past. You will then be ready to accept Rorty's proposed alternative conception of politics for the left: a tactical, issue-based politics concerned with "fighting injustice" and protecting the weak

against the strong, free of the illusion that there are deeper causes for that injustice and that weakness, or that there is a wider point of view than the local (how local?), or that there could be a larger strategy within which individual campaigns might be related to one another.

Such a vision of politics is not an alternative for the left but an alternative to it. For ever since its invention in Versailles in August 1789, the left (in its various incarnations—liberal, radical, socialist, reformist, revolutionary) has always been defined by its proclaimed commitment to "fighting injustice" and to protecting and empowering the weak. Its pursuit of that commitment, and in certain times and places its betrayal of it, can be recognized only because it has advanced successive but distinctive visions or theories of justice and of the structure of power that made clear in what injustice consists and who were weak and why: that is, in whose name and on what side it fought its political campaigns.

Most important, those campaigns were always seen as united by an overall strategy and sense of the "wider significance of events." To be on the left, in short, was precisely to have a larger view of how different instances of involuntary disadvantage, deprivation, oppression, exploitation, exclusion, and so on were connected and to have a program (whether reformist, radical, or revolutionary) that promised to rectify them. To what extent that promise, in different cases, was unfulfilled or betrayed is another story.

Is the age of such politics finally over? Is all that is left a politics of fragments, of local (how local?) issue-based campaigns, with no interconnections among them and no prospect

of strategic connections to link them up at national or international levels? Are feminists, antiracists, environmentalists, gay rights activists, civil rights groups, prison reformers, trade unionists, pressure groups for one-parent families or the aged or the handicapped all fated forever to go their separate ways because there is no longer any reason to see these various forms of involuntary disadvantage as having wider and deeper underlying causes and therefore no prospect of any overall strategy to remedy them? Some think so, and perhaps Rorty does, too, though he gives no reasons for doing so. Some think that advanced industrial societies are so complex that the left's project of seeking such causes is doomed. Others, like the late Friedrich von Hayek, believe that most such disadvantage is, in any case, a matter of bad luck, not injustice. Reactionaries, as Albert Hirschman has suggested, typically argue that every attempt at rectification is either perverse (worsening the situation it is intended to

ameliorate) or futile (leaving it unchanged) or else jeopardizes other valuable aspects of life. All such arguments (none of which Rorty here embraces) are arguments against the very project of any left argument, to which Rorty's article appears to lend support.

But that support is, as I have suggested, a house of cards. There is really no reason to think that to be on the left (as I have defined it) is distinctive in that it requires you to be devoted to intellectual or political self-promotion, utopian fantasy, monism, quasi-religious self-surrender to a larger cause, revolutionary romanticism, or outmoded grand narratives. It is, however, true that it commits you to hoping for "a process of enlightenment and emancipation" and to believing that such a process is, universally and not merely locally, better than a slide into barbarism and slavery. You do not have to adhere to a *grand récit* of "inevitable progress" or "immanent teleology" to retain that margin of hope. □

Richard Rorty Responds

I do not see why Steven Lukes thinks that the left's "pursuit of a commitment [to fighting injustice] . . . can be recognized only because it has advanced successive but distinctive visions or theories of justice and of the structure of power that made clear in what injustice consists and who were weak or why." I should have thought that it has always been a lot clearer who the weak are, and who is trying to improve their lot, than what justice consists in, or what structure power has.

I see definitions of justice as ways of bundling concrete proposals together, rather than as justifications for, or incitements to formulate, such proposals. Surely our sense of injustice is sufficiently roused by the simple thought, "Things don't have to be this way; they could be that way instead." For example: The cotton doesn't have to be picked by slaves, it could be done for wages. Daughters don't have to stay home while sons go off to be educated; boys and girls could split the money

available for education. All that profit doesn't have to go into luxuries for the owner's family; some of it could be distributed to the workers' families.

After we have envisaged a number of such possible changes, we can, for convenience of discussion, group a lot of them under a blanket phrase like "promoting equality of life-chances" or "ending the money-power." We may also wish to deduce their desirability from a suitably constructed philosophical definition of "justice." But I think that even in the absence of such phrases and such definitions, something reasonably called a "left" would, in every age, have been easily recognizable. I do not think something new was invented at Versailles in August 1789.

Nothing I say in my article suggests that "feminists, anti-racists, environmentalists, gay-rights activists, civil rights groups, prison reformers," and the like should "go their separate ways." Presumably they will form

coalitions, just as do priests and tyrants, steel magnates and beef barons, insurance lobbyists and drug-company lobbyists. But I do not think such coalitions need be based on "distinctive visions or theories" that make common interests evident.

I certainly agree with Lukes that being on the left does not "require you to be devoted to intellectual or political self-promotion, utopian fantasy, monism," and the like. But I should insist that a lot of leftist intellectuals still think that a synoptic vision of what is going on, with a sweep comparable to Marxism's, is a necessary propaedeutic to effective political action. Such intellectuals seem to me like

priests who think that effective aid to the widow and the orphan requires getting a clear conception of the duty of Charity, and of the structure of satanic power.

The women's movement in the United States (not to be confused with academic feminism) got along nicely without such a synoptic vision. So did the nineteenth-century abolitionists. I think that many intellectuals on the left still feel lost without such a vision, and that they cannot get the sort of vision they want without dreaming up the sort of *grand récit* about the movement of history that both Lukes and I find unnecessary. □

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Baruch Knei-Paz

WAS GEORGE ORWELL WRONG?

Technology and the Prospects for Democracy

*"It was a bright cold day in April,
and the clocks were striking thirteen."
George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four*

At the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where I work, the person in charge of the maintenance of photocopiers is a middle-aged recent immigrant from Russia named Ya'kov. He arrived in Israel in 1990 and has been with us for some two years. Since the photocopiers have an uncanny habit of breaking down whenever I use them, I have had ample occasion to call upon his services and have never ceased to marvel at the magic he works on these machines. Once, watching him bring back to life a photocopier I had no doubt was clinically dead, I remarked to him innocently: "Well, Ya'kov, whatever the sins and failures of the Soviet system, at least it produced an expert on photocopiers." His reply terminated my innocence: "You're obviously not an expert on the Soviet Union," he said. "The truth is, that until I came to Israel not only did I know nothing about servicing photocopiers, I didn't even know such a machine had been invented!"

As the old Jewish proverb says, an example is not a proof and, besides, Ya'kov had grown up in a small town in the remote Soviet republic of Uzbekistan, far from the supposedly modern offices of urban Russia; so perhaps too much should not be made of this research sample of one. But this brief exchange prompted me to reflect on the relationship between the already predominant information technology of our times—not only photocopiers, of course, but computers, and especially personal computers, modems, electronic mail,

fax machines, video recorders and hand-held video cameras, and the now emerging world of CD-ROM "multimedia"—and the world of politics.

There is little reliable data about the availability of computers and all the rest in the former Soviet Union. According to estimates, there were between a hundred thousand and two hundred thousand personal computers in the USSR in 1987. As for photocopiers, the acquisition of these was illegal to the very end, even if some dissidents managed to smuggle them in. Of course, the use of larger computers and of other information tools was widespread in those spheres—the military and space industries are obvious examples—where virtually nothing could be done without them. But whatever the precise figures, it is clear that at a time when the information "revolution," particularly in the form of personal computers, swept the Western world (in 1987, in the United States alone, there were some twenty-five million personal computers in use and more than five million were being produced each year), nothing even remotely resembling this transformation took place in the USSR. This cannot be because technological know-how was not available. Soviet mathematicians and computer scientists have always had a worldwide reputation. Nor can we attribute this "lagging behind" to the scarcity of resources: a system such as the Soviet, however impoverished, was always capable of changing priori-

ties and reallocating resources if it deemed the effort important enough. I suggest a different explanation, which might add a further perspective on the collapse of the Soviet Union and tell us something about the technological context of the postcommunist transition.

Everyone will remember the specter raised by George Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* of modern totalitarianism, perhaps modern government in general, mobilizing the resources of twentieth-century technology to impose its control over society and individuals. The novel painted a bleak picture of Big Brother watching us from every corner, so that even the most private activities did not escape his ubiquitous surveillance. The implication was clear: the more advanced technology becomes, the more it threatens to undermine personal freedom. Orwell's chilling vision was not meant to be a prediction. It was, rather, a warning and, some might claim, as a warning, it contributed to the non-materialization of that horrific dystopia.

Without wishing to take anything away from Orwell, I think that there was a more profound reason for the very different role technology turned out to play. The *character* of technology has been transformed so that it is more and more difficult for anyone or any single agency to control. Orwell's world was still a world of what might be called "heavy" machines, too large, too unwieldy, and too expensive to be available to anyone except a government or a large enterprise or institution. Even if others might try to get their hands on this type of technology, the police could easily prevent them from doing so. Imagine, in those days and until quite recently, trying to disseminate information, ideas, and political alternatives: broadcasting frequencies could be jammed, printing presses could be seized, and no one could possibly transmit television images without a vast and complex technological infrastructure.

As against this, *our* technology is of a completely different scale: in 1946 the state-of-the-art computer took up two thousand square feet of space and had an internal memory capacity equivalent to about twenty words; today, a standard silicon chip measures a quarter of an inch across and can store the

digital equivalent of eight hundred thousand words while working at a speed greater by a factor of about one million. But miniaturization has qualitative, not merely quantitative, consequences. We are only at the beginnings of this phenomenon—nanotechnology is yet to come—but its implications are already clear: miniaturized electronic technology and its major product, information, cannot be controlled. It is as hopeless and as exorbitantly expensive for governments to develop a control-technology as it is to develop the various generations of anti-anti-anti . . . missile missiles. Though still largely in principle only, we all have access now to all the information available at any one time, almost as a collective good.

Politically this means two things: first, the resources of the individual have grown immeasurably; second, these resources are easily utilized against the political center. We have already witnessed the more obvious manifestations of this: in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, students communicated with the outside world by means of fax machines; in Bucharest, the uprising against Ceaușescu was staged in a makeshift television station; in Moscow, CNN satellites effectively joined forces with those resisting the coup attempt of August 1991; and on the West Bank, I have seen Palestinian children being handed miniature video cameras by foreign journalists to photograph their own *intifada*. But there are other, far more subtle and profound effects that are transforming the relationship of the "computerized" individual to his or her political environment. Dependence on authority, on the political center and the resources it has to offer, is decreasing, making it far more difficult for the center to mobilize support. This is a worldwide phenomenon, but what concerns me here is its possible impact on the current uneasy prospects for democracy in the former communist societies.

Imagine Soviet leaders confronting the following dilemma at some time during the recent past: in order to keep pace with the modern world economy, it was essential to introduce on a mass scale into the Soviet economy the information revolution and all its vast paraphernalia. Not to do so would mean

that Soviet economic enterprises, of whatever size and character, could not compete on the world market and, what is more, the economy itself could not grow. On the other hand, to do so would mean making available to large numbers of Soviet citizens and organizations instruments that would soon jeopardize the regime's political control, its still virtually total hegemony over society. This hegemony was once maintained, under Stalin, through disempowerment and the brutal use of terror. Following Stalin, the regime maintained popular disempowerment but now discovered that a socioeconomic arrangement that made each citizen completely dependent on the political center was just as effective as massive force. The main exception to this general pattern of dependence was the spread of organized crime, as might be expected in such a system, but criminals have an interest in the preservation of a system under which they thrive and thus constitute no political threat to the regime.

I have no evidence to prove this, but it is worth suggesting that, faced with this dilemma, the Soviet leadership chose the safer alternative, namely, to sacrifice economic development for the sake of political control. When he came to power, Gorbachev tried valiantly to turn things around. In a sense, the policy of glasnost that he introduced was a reflection of the concept of "information," prevalent by now throughout the world. But by now, of course, it was too late or, perhaps, Gorbachev's predecessors were proved right: openness, including technological openness, would mean the end of the Soviet political system.

Considering the postcommunist transition, we can hardly ignore the impact of the computer: age upon the process itself and its eventual outcome. There is no longer any effective way of preventing the spread of information technology in Russia and the other formerly communist nations. No doubt, the price of even the cheapest computers is still prohibitive for most citizens, but these machines and their kindred will take root one way or another, sooner or later. The old phenom-

non of "combined development"—whereby latecomers to a technology are able to leap over earlier "generations" and adopt the most recent advances—is already taking place, as witness the sophisticated use of television satellites. Moreover, in most if not all postcommunist societies, the political center is now inordinately weak both because new political institutions have not yet coalesced and because the communist experience has undermined faith in politics and made all claims to power suspect. The new technology will surely play into the hands of the contemporary civic reality: if once the political center ruled over the peripheries, today it is the peripheries—ethnic, cultural, economic, and, yes, criminal—that lord it over the center, though they do not yet constitute an institutionalized civil society.

Of course, I am not arguing that technology is everything or even that it is an independent variable. But we have historical precedents for the ultimate impact a new technology may have in eroding the power of once hegemonic institutions. To take a kindred example, the invention of movable type and the printing press in Europe in the fifteenth century contributed immeasurably to the decline of ecclesiastical power: before that the Church could control the dissemination of books—information, ideas, knowledge—through its monopoly over scribes reproducing texts in a language, Latin, accessible only to a few. Thereafter, it could neither control the dissemination of print nor the replacement of Latin by the vernacular, with all the attendant sociological consequences.

The introduction of the printing press marked the beginning of literacy in Europe, a personal and collective resource that in turn would become indispensable to the creation of an industrial economy and the emergence of more democratic political institutions. Literacy did not, obviously, prevent the emergence also of new forms of despotism. But the fact that despots always begin by restricting access to information testifies to the centrality of that resource, today as in the past, as an intrinsically countervailing force.

The computer, like other electronic machines, is only a tool. Nevertheless, it remains

essentially an empowering tool. The easier the access, the greater the diffusion of power. It is hardly fortuitous that an era of vastly increased inclusion of groups previously excluded from power and resources is also an era during which access to information has escalated beyond anything that could have been imagined a decade ago. Already today, in the United States, nearly 40 percent of homes have at least one personal computer. The spread of this machine has been nothing short of spectacular, and it will not be long before it is as common a household "appliance" as the refrigerator or the washing machine, but with more far-reaching consequences for society and its political institutions. It is only a matter of time

before a similar phenomenon takes an irreversible hold over the former communist societies.

The "computer age" is, therefore, a revolution in the magnitude of our access to a collective good and thus a transformation of the extent to which individuals and groups need to be dependent upon agencies outside themselves. The new technology cannot of itself prevent the rise of dictators and dictatorships; but it will make life very difficult for such leaders and regimes. We should bear this in mind when assessing the prospects for democratic institutions in postcommunist societies. The next time the clocks strike thirteen, most people will know that this merely throws doubt on all that went before. □

Brian Morton

THE EQUALIZER & ME: A CONFESSION

Sometimes I worry that after I die I'll find myself in an office, sitting across from a man who has a printout showing how I spent every minute of my life. He isn't using the information to decide my fate. He's just doing some research on the gulf between who we are and who we claim to be.

"Now, you claimed to be passionately interested in literature," he says, "and you believed that Tolstoy was the greatest writer who ever lived. But I see here that you spent a total of 260 hours in the company of Tolstoy—300 hours if we count the time you

spent reading biographies and criticism—whereas you spent more than a thousand hours in the company of someone named David Letterman. How do you account for that?"

I wouldn't know how to answer. How *can* I account for the amount of time I waste staring vacantly at the garbage on TV?

Even to put the question this way—"the amount of time I waste"—is to tell a lie. Some of the garbage on television means a lot to me.

A few years ago I became addicted to nightly reruns of a television show from the eighties, *The Equalizer*. An aging secret agent, Robert

McCall, sick at heart because of all the terrible things he's done, quits the CIA and, hoping to wash some of the blood off his hands, sets himself up as a freelance do-gooder in New York. He puts an ad in the paper; people in trouble seek him out; and he helps them, usually for free.

In almost every show, while doing the Lord's work in this way, he has to kill a few people. You get the impression that if there are two thousand murders a year in New York, half of them are committed by the Equalizer.

The different episodes unfold with an exquisite formal consistency, like the ritual dramas of ancient China. In the first fifteen minutes we're introduced to the victim of the week—a woman threatened by a vengeful former husband, an impoverished retiree harassed by a slumlord, whatever. She—let's say it's a she—is desperate; the police can't help; she has nowhere to turn. Then she notices the ad in the paper: "Odds Against You? Need Help? Call The Equalizer." Hesitantly, she reaches for the phone . . .

I could make a defense of the show's intelligence, I suppose. Many of the episodes deal with McCall's past and the horrors he perpetrated when he worked for the government. In one show, for example, he travels to Latin America to rescue an investigative journalist who's being tortured by a brutal right-wing regime—a regime that McCall himself helped bring to power in a military coup years earlier. In another he tangles with an Oliver North type, a fanatic who makes common cause with terrorists and druglords in the name of the war against communism. In the middle of the Reagan era, the show often took a scathing view of U.S. foreign policy.

McCall himself is an interestingly ambiguous character. Since he's always resorting to violence, the last moments of many episodes show him in a state of despair, convinced that he hasn't changed at all—convinced that he's merely found a new outlet for his own diseased need to use force.

Probably the most intelligent thing about the show is the acting of Edward Woodward, the Englishman who plays the lead role. Best known for his portrayal of the title character in

Bruce Beresford's *Breaker Morant*, a film about the last days of the Boer War, Woodward brings to the role of Robert McCall a passion and a subtlety that go far beyond anything provided by the script.

I could make a better case for the show's ridiculousness. The Equalizer's heroics are often rather unlikely. He outruns twenty-five-year-old thugs and tosses them around at will. He drives his Jaguar into Harlem to confront a street gang, delivers blistering lectures to hostile, heavily armed young men, and somehow both this sixtyish, paunchy hero and his luxury car emerge untouched. He has an enormous supply of friends with time on their hands, so he can provide around-the-clock security for an AIDS-infected kindergartner menaced by neighborhood bullies. And he has the rhetorical skills of a Cicero, so he can finally persuade the bullies to change their ways; weeping with remorse, they embrace the child, and all is well.

Sometimes the show seems not just dumb, but ugly. You could argue that, in the climate of the mid-1980s, featuring a hero who stalks around New York with a gun, taking care of problems the police can't handle, the show was glorifying the vigilante antics of people like Bernhard Goetz.

Nevertheless, I watched it every night, and if they were still showing the reruns I would watch them all over again.

About a year ago, a friend of mine who was enduring a prolonged depression was confined to a psychiatric hospital against her will. I went to see her, and a bored-looking little man at the security desk told me that visitors weren't permitted in her ward. I sputtered out a few weak words of protest and turned away, cowed, resigned to going home. Then I thought, Fucking Robert McCall would never let them turn *him* away. The fucking Equalizer would find some way to get in there.

I realized that there was no excuse for being cowed by authority: I could make *myself* the authority figure here. I could intimidate the security man if I just acted the part. I walked back and told him, briskly and matter-of-factly—I tried to find the tone of a man who's never contradicted—that I needed to see my

friend, that I had a flight to catch in less than two hours, and that I had no time to argue about it. The man suddenly seemed a little vague, a little lost; he didn't meet my eyes; and without another word about the hospital rules, he let me in.

My friend was in a tiny windowless room, pacing back and forth. She told me it would kill her to stay there. She said that if she was half crazy now, she'd go all the way crazy if they kept her locked up. She kept pinching her eyelid; when I asked her if something was wrong with her eye, she said she didn't know.

I talked to two of the psychologists on the floor, who said they intended to prevent her from leaving: they thought she was a danger to herself. I knew her well enough to be sure they were wrong. I wished that she could *choose* to stay: I thought they might be able to do more for her there than she'd been doing for herself on the outside. But since she was so sure that she wanted to get out—it was the first thing she'd been sure about in months—I felt I had to try to help her get out.

The next day, when, along with her family, I talked the people at the hospital into letting her leave, I continued to be Robert McCall. I even dressed like McCall that morning, in a three-piece suit.

Adolescent boys reach toward manhood by imitating athletes and television detectives. It's embarrassing to admit that at thirty-nine I'm still an adolescent boy; but there it is. In a time of distress, I called on the Equalizer to tell me what to do. So can I claim that I watch dumb shows on television merely to waste time?

There's a personal element in all this that I haven't mentioned. One of the things I like about the Equalizer is that he reminds me of my father, who died in 1984. He has the same white hair; the same manner of dress—almost militantly formal; the same crisp, unsentimental style; and the same unhesitating sense of right and wrong.

More than this: when I was writing about the incident in the hospital, I realized it had a direct precedent in something I once heard my father say. My father was the head of a labor union in New York City; about a year before his death he told a story about another union leader, a

man whom he regarded with scorn. He said that this other man, during a time of difficult contract negotiations, had come to speak to some of the workers he represented—they were workers in a hospital, now that I think of it—and that management had forced him to leave the building. "He went meekly," my father said. "If it was me I would have told them, 'You want me to leave, you'll have to carry me out.' " Though he was sixty-six years old when he said this, I have no doubt that he would have told them exactly that.

But if the Equalizer means something to me largely because he reminds me of my father, the question remains: when I needed to draw on some of the ferocity, the force, that my father possessed in such great supply, why did I use a TV character as an intermediary? If I needed a fictional intermediary at all, couldn't I have found a better one? Surely, in the vast record of world literature, there are richer, more complex figures who share some of my father's traits.

Yes, surely there are—but I haven't come across them; I've been too busy watching TV.

If you asked me who my heroes are, I'd mention Chekhov and Lawrence and Whitman and Henry James and William James. But to make it an honest list, I'd also have to name people like Robert McCall; or Pat Riley, the relentless coach of the New York Knicks; or Jean-Luc Picard, the tragic, noble, stoical, bald-headed captain on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

Unhappy is the man who needs heroes; but I'm not sure that the man without heroes is any happier. Last week, a year after her first stay in the hospital, my friend decided to check herself back in. Her depression had lifted for a few months, and then returned. She wasn't eating, she wasn't sleeping, she'd lost her job; and though she was desperately afraid of going back, she didn't see any other choice. I encouraged her to make the decision, and after she made it I drove her out there.

When we came within a few miles of the hospital she began to panic. She said she couldn't go through with it; it would be better to go back home; it would be better to hide in

bed; it would be better to die. "Maybe I can just die. Let's call Dr. Kevorkian. Can he kill people just for misery?" She hadn't lost the sense of humor that is one of the many things I love about her, but she was terribly afraid. She begged me not to make her go.

Her panic made me panic. I didn't know what might happen to her in the hospital. I didn't know if I should pretend to be sure they could help her there or admit that I was almost as scared as she was. I didn't know whether to be firm or yielding; whether to try to talk her into this or let her go home. I didn't know who to be.

I thought of how I had made myself equal to the situation a year before by pretending to be Robert McCall. I tried to summon him up again, but he didn't work for me this time: evidently he could guide me only during action scenes.

I searched for someone else to call on. I don't know why it had to be a man, but apparently it had to be: it never even occurred to me to think of a woman. I tried my father, but he couldn't guide me either—not because he'd been gone so long, but because he was never a skilled navigator of emotionally complex situations. Or maybe that's unfair; maybe the problem was simply that he was too unlike me for me to draw on him now. I did remember the gentleness that sometimes came

over him when he was dealing with people in trouble, but the memory didn't take me very far.

I wondered what William James would do in my place. I knew that he'd be full of sympathy for my friend—because he was a sympathetic man, and because he knew what it was to touch bottom; and I knew that, a champion of the power of the will, he would stress the part that my friend could play—would have to play—in her own recovery. But beyond that, he had nothing to say to me. Maybe I should try reading one of his books all the way through sometime, instead of skimming.

Finally I thought, Can't you just be yourself, without heroes? And since my customary heroes were of so little use to me in that moment, I thought, Well, I guess I'll have to be.

My friend sat beside me, shivering, with her knees drawn up under her chin. "Are you sure it'll help me? What if they give me the wrong medication and I flip out? What if some crazy person rapes me in there? Can't I just stay here and sleep in the glove compartment? What if they decide I'm suicidal and never let me out? Are you sure this'll help me? What if it makes me worse?"

I had no idea what to say. I kept driving. She took my hand, and both of us held on tight. □

 Oliver Conant

SAVING DEMOCRACY IN THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

D*emocratic Culture* is the newsletter of Teachers for a Democratic Culture (TDC), an organization of somewhat under two thousand left academics, primarily from the fields of English and the humanities. Published three times a year, it consists of articles, excerpts from books, essays, and reviews, most of which contest what the editors regard as a campaign by the right to distort and vilify the work of adherents to "new academic movements." It has run pieces on the future of gay and lesbian studies, how to "popularize" the humanities, sexual harassment, "critical pedagogy," free speech and race, and the "media hyping" of Camille Paglia. Some of this overlaps with the material examined in the conservative monthly *Heterodoxy*, which I reviewed in these pages (*Dissent*, Fall 1994). Although the tone of *Democratic Culture* is far more restrained than the cheerfully sanguinary approach of *Heterodoxy*, both publications seethe with ideological animus. Some of the same kind of indiscriminate lumping of opponents goes on at both places, as witness Gregory Jay, who in the course of an article on "Liberalism and Multiculturalism" asserts, "Left liberals such as Irving Howe, C. Vann Woodward, John Searle, and Arthur Schlesinger (and, one might add, virtually everyone now associated with *Partisan Review*) echo the neoconservative line on cultural politics, often relying uncritically on sources like Dinesh D'Souza."

The treatment accorded in a recent issue (Fall 1994) to Christina Hoff Sommers's *Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women* is another case in point. Sommers's

book is a polemical account of what she calls "gender feminism": its obfuscatory jargon, victimolatry, endless self-regard, and tendency to purvey wildly inaccurate statistical information, such as the widely reported claim that "in this country alone . . . about 150,000 females die of anorexia each year." These figures, Sommers points out, are for *sufferers* of anorexia; the *morbidity* rate for the disease (for the year 1991) was 54. Sommers's arguments deserve consideration, but of the fifteen essays included in *Democratic Culture*'s "symposium" on *Who Stole Feminism?* fourteen, with a handful of caveats, attack it and her for being "shallow" and "unscholarly," for believing in a "monolithic feminism," for "misrepresenting" women's studies, or for "abuse" of opponents and the "invention of feminist conspiracies." One article, acknowledging the effectiveness of Sommers's "cannily crafted attempt at a hatchet job" uses the occasion to urge the development of "communicators and feminist PR experts who have 'scribal' abilities."

From the five issues that I have seen, the articles in *Democratic Culture* fall into three categories: measured argument, rhetorical posturing, and debunking. Examples of the first include Gerald Graff's and Jay's "Some Questions About Critical Pedagogy" (Fall 1993) in which they oppose what they call "ethical pedagogy" to Paulo Freire's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and criticize the "oppositional pedagogy" of Donald Morton and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, described as a "post-structuralist updating of the notion of ideology articulated by Marx." Graff and Jay character-

ized their essay as “a personal view,” to which they invited readers “to submit responses and challenges.” Morton and Zavarzadeh’s reply, printed in a subsequent (Spring 1994) issue, is instructive. Entitled “Yes, You are Reactionaries: A Letter,” it begins, “Having read your most recent desperate attempt to legitimate an oppressive bourgeois pluralism,” goes on to indict “your democracy and its allied pedagogy” as serving to “legitimate the violence that constitutes the extraction of surplus labor (profit) from the masses of exploited workers for the benefit of the few” and concludes with denunciations of “your reactionary moralist and corporate humanist theory of the subject.” One of the peculiar features of *Democratic Culture* is that its own pages furnish plentiful instances of the kind of thinking, expressed in the kind of language, that its editorial policy is concerned to show has been either greatly exaggerated or actually invented by the right. But Mas’ud Zavarzadeh and Donald Morton are not invented, and their letter is not, as another letter writer (Fall 1994) humorously suggested, a parody; they are both professors of English at Syracuse University, where they publish their own left academic periodical: *Transformation: Marxist Boundary Work in Theory, Economics, Politics and Culture*.

The debunking pieces are largely confined to disputing press accounts of PC horror stories, or exposing distortions or ignorance in right-wing attacks on trends in literary theory. John K. Wilson, who appears on the masthead as the newsletter editor, and whose byline identifies him as “a graduate student in Social Thought at the University of Chicago,” goes about these tasks with notable zeal. But his haste to show up the right’s recklessness can make him careless. In “McCarthyism and the Case of Johnetta Cole” (Spring 1993) he accuses the *Forward* newspaper and A.M. Rosenthal of the “guilt by association tactics of the McCarthy era.” (In 1992 Cole headed the Clinton transition team’s “cluster” for labor, humanities, and education and was herself under consideration for secretary of education). McCarthyism, however, traded in spurious charges, whereas to my knowledge no one has

publicly confuted Cole’s long history as a supporter of totalitarian regimes. As it happens, the dismaying facts of that history are duly listed by Wilson himself, whose studied incuriosity about them suggests that he fails to understand the gravamen of the case against Cole’s candidacy.

Teachers for a Democratic Culture was founded in 1991 by Gerald Graff, Gregory Jay, and others as a sort of public relations operation to explain the ideas of the academic left to a public that they imagine to have been misled by malicious ideologues on the right, abetted by a cynical media. The TDC has lobbied Congress, held conferences, and as its “coordinators,” Graff and Jay, reported in the first issue of *Democratic Culture* in 1991, “gained the beginnings of a voice in the national media.” The *New York Times* ran a sympathetic page-one story on the TDC’s formation (“In Battle on Political Correctness, Scholars Begin a Counteroffensive,” *New York Times*, September 25, 1991) and the group’s aims have been reported, also positively, in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Lingua Franca*.

All this favorable attention, not ordinarily bestowed on university-based *groupuscules*, probably owed much to the celebrity value of some of the names listed among the “Original Signatories” of a “Statement of Principles” put out by the TDC on its founding, including such highly visible academics as Houston Baker, Stanley Fish, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Richard Rorty, and Edward Said. This Statement of Principles, excerpts of which have been reprinted in the newsletter and sent to subscribers, is a curious document. It mixes hortatory professions of democratic purpose with (courtesy of the young critic Michael Bérubé) an insider’s attitude that comes off as slightly snide and smug; Bérubé is cited as observing that “recent literary theory is so rarely accorded the privilege of representing itself in nonacademic forums that journalists, disgruntled professors, embittered ex-graduate students and their family and friends now feel entitled to say anything at all about the academy.” Bérubé, who has himself had no appre-

cialable difficulty in representing the claims of theory in all sorts of nonacademic places—first the *Village Voice*, most recently, the *New Yorker*—is here no doubt writing on behalf of colleagues less gifted with his “scribal ability” when he vents his scorn at all those uncredentialed outsiders or failed aspirants to professional status who have dared to speak with such deplorable—well, freedom?

A certain vagueness, perhaps a strategic one, attaches to the program articulated by the Statement. Asking, “what does the notion of a ‘democratic culture’ mean and how does it relate to education?” it returns this answer:

...in our view, a democratic culture is one that acknowledges that criteria of value in art are not permanently fixed by tradition and authority, but are subject to constant revision. It is a culture in which terms like “canon,” “literature,” “tradition,” “artistic value,” “common culture” and even “truth” are seen as disputed rather than given. This means not that standards for judging art and scholarship must be discarded, but that such standards should evolve out of democratic processes in which they can be thoughtfully challenged.

Of this bit of exposition one might want to ask how standards can be said to remain, or even to be, standards in any meaningful sense if they are subject to “constant revision,” or what the hopeful phrase, “democratic processes” actually means. For this reader the quoted passage is remarkable mainly for its implicit assumption that there is nothing in the world more consequential than deliberations about the canon, as if the monthly faculty meeting—whose air the passage fairly breathes—were the equivalent of a constitutional convention.

While I was preparing to write this piece I discovered that no one I knew had ever heard of the TDC or its newsletter. The flurry of publicity that greeted its formation has not been followed with any more stories, while the recent formation of the breakaway Association of Literary Scholars (which has links to *Heterodoxy* and David Horowitz’s Center for the Study of Popular Culture) just got its *Times* story. Perhaps, as recent fund raising appeals in the newsletter suggest—“WE DESPERATELY

NEED your money to continue producing *Democratic Culture* and coordinating the other activities of TDC”—it’s all just a matter of underfunding, an old story on the left. But even if *Democratic Culture* were as flush as its counterparts on the right, it remains uncertain, judging from their performances to date, whether the contributors to the newsletter would ever succeed in getting their message across to a larger public. And so this segment of the academic left, confusing the urgency of creating and defending a democratic culture with propagating the pieties of advanced literary criticism, finds itself, yet again, talking to itself.

This is a pity. The neocon, paleocon and yahoo crowd really does, after all—not always but often enough—wantonly caricature people and their ideas in the service of their own ideologies. Those ideologies are in many ways inimical to the beleaguered enterprise of sustaining liberal education in America, and they should be intelligently and clearly opposed. In the pages of *Democratic Culture* this work remains undone. □

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ANTONIO GRAMSCI: CLÁSICO DE LA FILOSOFÍA POLÍTICA

Textos de Giuseppe Vacca, Francesca Izzo, Claudia Mancina, Michele Giliberto, Alfredo Salsano, Mario Teló, Gianni Francioni, Dora Kanoussi, Gabriel Vargas Lozano

NÚMERO ESPECIAL ENTITADO COMO LA COLABORACIÓN DEL INSTITUTO "GRAMSCI", DE ROMA



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George M. Fredrickson

THE CONSERVATIVE MIND

THE SOUTHERN TRADITION: THE ACHIEVEMENT AND LIMITATIONS OF AN AMERICAN CONSERVATISM, by Eugene D. Genovese. Harvard University Press, 1994. 138 pp. \$22.50.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Eugene Genovese revolutionized historical writing about the Old South. Using a supple form of Marxian analysis, he ended the reign of the "consensus" historians, who had viewed white southerners as guilt-ridden liberals driven by their economic interests to defend an institution that contradicted the democratic values that they shared with other Americans. Seeking to rescue the slaveholders from the enormous condescension of liberal historians, he took them seriously and on their own terms, finding in the proslavery argument an authentic American variant of the reactionary anti-capitalism or anti-modernism that had arisen in Europe among defenders of *anciens régimes* against the bourgeois utopianism of the French Revolution.

At the time that he published books like *The Political Economy of Slavery* (1965), *The World the Slaveholders Made* (1969), and *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1974), Genovese was in the forefront of a new leftist historiography that was affirming the existence of class conflict and ideological polarization in the same American past that earlier historians, convinced of "American exceptionalism," had divested of such "Old World" characteristics. But there was a peculiarity in Genovese's way of doing this. Whereas most New Left historians concentrated on finding social radicalism and proto-Marxism among the underprivileged, Genovese sought opposition to liberal capitalism on the

far right. The conventional Marxist view of the slaveholding South, originated by Marx himself, was that it represented capitalism in an extremely savage form. Genovese not only denied this interpretation but wrote about the slaveholders' resistance to bourgeois hegemony with respect and even with a qualified kind of admiration. (Whatever else they might have been, he seemed to be saying, at least they were not capitalists.)

Genovese's earlier work had made it seem that the worldview of the slaveholders had died with the institution that sustained it. As a historical materialist, he could hardly make a claim for the survival of the slaveholders' ideology once slavery itself had been abolished. But the Genovese of the 1990s is profoundly antagonistic to the left as it now exists. Besides repudiating much of the socialist tradition, he has become a fierce critic of multiculturalism, radical feminism, and any other ideology that posits as its ideal the liberation of the individual from traditional forms of hierarchy and authority. Consequently, he is prepared to seek allies, or at least inspiration, from the cultural right. Still the anticapitalist, he looks once again to a southern tradition that he believes offers an alternative, not only to liberal capitalism but to the cultural left as well. Rather than having gone to its grave with "the peculiar institution," the southern tradition, it now appears, has survived in the thought of a few twentieth-century southern intellectuals—the Nashville Agrarians of the 1930s and their conservative academic descendants, men like Richard Weaver of the University of Chicago, who died in 1969, and Melvin E. Bradford of the University of Texas at Dallas, who achieved brief notoriety when Ronald Reagan attempted unsuccessfully to

make him head of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The Southern Tradition, based on a series of lectures that Genovese gave at Harvard in 1993, is both intellectual history and social philosophy. It seeks to establish the centrality in southern conservative thought of what might best be described as an antimodernist traditionalism and then attempts to use its insights to expose the dangerously utopian—and incipiently totalitarian—tendencies of the contemporary left. Such an enterprise is likely to impress most readers of this journal as perverse. It would seem undeniable that two salient features of southern conservatism have been its presumption of white supremacy and its commitment to laissez-faire economic policies, especially on the part of the federal government. Genovese is fully aware of these problems and attempts to deal with them. Racism, he asserts here as he has done in his other works, is an incidental or secondary rather than an essential or primary part of the southern tradition. (We will examine this claim in some detail below.) Reluctance to interfere with the market economy, on the other hand, represents a failure of southern conservatives to appreciate what it will take to enforce their own basic values. Genovese notes:

True, private ownership and the exercise of firm authority in management are essential for economic efficiency as well as the preservation of freedom. But then, the alternative to present arrangements may well reside in the extension of republican political traditions to the economy—to a constitutional arrangement that protects private interests, including the right to inherit property, while it respects the ultimate power of the people, acting collectively, to establish proper limits on individual action. At issue here is the challenge to devise property relations that can sustain a “social bond individualism” [Richard Weaver’s term for the South’s alternative to the anarchic individualism of the antebellum North] strong enough to repress both license and totalitarian tendencies.

Some of this sounds remarkably like an endorsement of the social democracy that Genovese elsewhere disparages. In some respects, clearly, his attack on contemporary left liberalism is congruent with the communitarian chal-

lenge to an exclusive emphasis on individual rights and personal liberation that has provoked some healthy soul-searching within the left itself. But when he repudiates rationalism and egalitarianism and bases his conception of community on a respect for myth, “prejudice,” and social hierarchy, he has clearly deserted the Enlightenment tradition that has sustained the left since the eighteenth century and made common cause with its enemies. Edmund Burke, rather than Marx or even Thomas Jefferson, would seem to be his current ideological hero, just as he “has long been a hero to southern conservatives.”

The issues of social and political philosophy raised by Genovese’s neo-Burkean conservatism could be endlessly debated. But what about the purely historical foundations of the work? Has he fully and accurately described and analyzed “the southern tradition,” or has he invented a tradition to suit his own polemical purposes? In my opinion, he has here—and throughout his work—misconceived the South and what it represents. He has done this by focusing on some aspects of southern thought and experience at the expense of others that are at least as important. Because of his strong ideological commitments—first on the left and now the cultural right—he has tended to find what he was looking for in the southern past rather than pursuing an open-ended inquiry into how, on the basis of the available historical evidence, we can best answer the questions that we have chosen to ask. Historians who seek to go beyond antiquarianism and engage contemporary issues will inevitably allow their personal concerns to affect how they pose their questions, frame their hypotheses, and decide what is important and needs to be emphasized. But Genovese does more than this: he begins his inquiries with a set of basic theoretical or philosophical assumptions that he seeks to explicate, assumptions that do not seem subject to falsification or revision on the basis of the evidence.

Is it really true that “the southern tradition” has been essentially anticapitalist or antimodernist, while only incidentally or secondarily racist, as Genovese claims? In recent years a

number of competent historians (such as James Oakes, Shearer Davis Bowman, Michael Perman, and Norrece Jones) have raised serious doubts about Genovese's conception of the ideological character and legacy of the Old South. For the most part, Genovese has cavalierly ignored his critics and failed to answer their objections to his interpretations.

It has always seemed to me, as I have written on a number of occasions in the past twenty-five years, that an insistence on racial difference and inequality was a central rather than a secondary feature of southern slaveholding ideology. A few slaveholding theorists did indeed argue in principle that slavery need not be restricted to blacks, but they never actually proposed enslaving poor white southerners or even denying them equal citizenship, and most of them conceded that white people could not be safely made into slaves, because it would be in their nature to fight to the death against servitude. As desirable as slavery might be to ensure the safety and stability of any society, only biracial societies like the South, which was fortunate enough to have at its disposal a race of "natural" slaves, could avoid for long the intellectual heresies and social disorders produced by democracy and the free labor system. Besides being an apparently archaic system of unfree labor, therefore, slavery as practiced and justified in the South was also a manifestation of white supremacy, and it was defended most insistently and effectively on those grounds. Genovese is simply wrong when he says in *The Southern Tradition* that the Old South "rejected scientific racism." It is true that one version of it—the biblically unorthodox view of multiple creations—aroused some controversy, but the equally racist contention that blacks, although originally the progeny of Adam and Eve, had evolved into a distinct and permanently inferior variety of the human species enjoyed wide acceptance in religious circles. Many of the Old South's political leaders, including Jefferson Davis, actually embraced the more radical version, as is evident in their references to blacks as "pre-Adamites."

Much of the criticism of Genovese's interpretation of the Old South has been directed at

his contention that the region's political economy and governing social philosophy were "pre-capitalist." Genovese assumes on the basis of an abstract Marxism that contradicts some of Marx's own historical and political writings that capitalism and "free labor" are synonymous. *Ipso facto*, an economy and society based on slaveholding must be noncapitalist. But does it really make sense to deny that capitalism can coexist with a system of unfree labor? South Africa at the height of apartheid relied heavily on the short-term servitude of black contract laborers, but no one has suggested that South Africa in the 1950s was a precapitalist society. If a combination of private property, private control over capital, and the use of capital to produce commodities for profit in a market economy are taken to be the essential features of capitalism—as most economists would maintain—then the Old South was a thoroughly capitalistic society. From this perspective, the internal slave trade, which was a central and ubiquitous aspect of southern economic life, represents the logical outcome of a radical commodification of labor rather than simply an embarrassing anomaly in an otherwise "paternalistic" system.

To claim that the South was capitalistic is not the same as saying that it was liberal or democratic. Liberal democracy is not an essential feature of capitalism any more than free labor is. (One has only to look around the world to become aware of this fact.) The conservative ideologues of the Old South, as well as some of their successors, had no real objection to capitalism as an economic system. What they opposed was the ideal of human equality that had arisen out of eighteenth-century revolutionary struggles against inherited privilege and that nineteenth-century abolitionists made a core principle of their attack on the enslavement of African Americans.

If equality and not capitalism was really the issue, and if the inequality that was being defended was primarily or inescapably based on race, then the southern conservatism for which Genovese seeks to gain a hearing is not likely to arouse much sympathy from anyone

who is not on the extreme right. Impelled by Genovese's accolades, I sat down to read Richard Weaver, the foremost exemplar in the mid-twentieth century of the kind of southern traditionalism that Genovese believes could teach us something of value. I am prepared to grant that Weaver is an interesting and provocative exponent of anti-modernism from a southern perspective. But if we are careful to notice what it is that inspires Weaver's most passionate diatribes against the modern world, we find that it is the allegedly hypocritical efforts of Yankee reformers to interfere with the South's racial hierarchy. In his posthumously published books *The Southern Tradition at Bay* (1968) and *Southern Essays* (1986), Weaver excoriates the abolitionists, the Radical Republicans of the Reconstruction era, and the antisegregationists of the 1950s, including the U.S. Supreme Court for its mandating of "forced integration." Is it possible to disentangle Weaver's critique of commercialization and industrialization from his stalwart defense of legalized racial inequality? Perhaps. But it is difficult to know in the case of Weaver, as in the case of Genovese's favorite antebellum conservative, George Fitzhugh, which came first—the wholesale rejection of the modern world for its excesses of individualism and materialism or the impulse to defend one or another of the South's peculiar racial institutions against a serious challenge. The humanistic culture of a Fitzhugh or a Weaver made them realize that a defense of the South based on racism was intellectually primitive or threadbare if it was not accompanied by categorical rejection of the ideal of equality. But in both cases the racism was never repudiated and may have remained close to the root of their concerns, even as it became subsumed under a more comprehensive "conservatism." For a majority of conservative southerners in both the 1850s and the 1950s simple racism was probably sufficient, and modernity did not have to be rejected in all its aspects. Embraced with few qualms were modern economic practices and institutions that served the interests of men with property and capital, including property and capital in a human form.

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Genovese's effort to deemphasize the role of white supremacy in the southern tradition does not mean that he condones or ignores the racism of his subjects. Although he denies its centrality in their thinking, he takes note of it and forthrightly condemns it as a deeply regrettable aspect of their thought. What he finds fundamental and valuable in their thinking is

opposition to finance capitalism and, more broadly, to the effort to substitute the market for society itself; opposition to the radical individualism that is sweeping America today; support for broad property ownership and a market economy subject to socially determined moral constraints; adherence to a Christian individualism that condemns personal license and demands submission to a moral consensus rooted in elementary piety; and an insistence that every people must

develop its own genius based on its special history, and must reject siren calls to an internationalism—or rather a cosmopolitanism—that would eradicate local and national cultures and standards of personal conduct by reducing morals and all else to commodities.

This kind of an attack against contemporary liberalism and radicalism, whatever its pedigree and however compromised its southern manifestation may have been, deserves to be taken seriously. People on the left might accept the validity of its critique of a market-driven society without conceding that a traditional hierarchical society is the only alternative. But it remains to be seen, in the wake of the discrediting of state socialism, just what kind of egalitarian communalism is possible. Genovese has therefore issued an important and valuable challenge to thoughtful people on the left. It is regrettable, however, that he has chosen to find the substance for this challenge in an intellectual tradition that could not distinguish between conservative conceptions of social order and the domination of one race by another and was woefully inconsistent or ineffectual in its opposition to market capitalism.

But the exercise may be instructive in a way that he never intended. He has illustrated the kind of uses—or misuses—to which some of the conservative ideas that he admires can easily be put. It is one thing to advocate “social hierarchy” and respect for “legitimate authority” in general terms as an antidote to the normlessness and anomie of modern life. It is something else entirely to defend specific inequalities and assertions of authority. Such defenses usually turn out be based on status anxiety, greed, racism, or sexism rather than on a commitment to the common good. Conservative ideology often serves as a rationale for injustice. Prescriptions for an organic community that repudiate equality as a social goal can readily sanction a defense of the prevailing distribution of power and privilege. The left may be in deep trouble and in need of new ideas, but an ideology that so easily lends itself to the self-serving defense of things as they are provides no answer. □

Christine Stansell

AN OPINIONATED WOMAN

REASONABLE CREATURES, by Katha Pollitt. Knopf, 1994. 186 pp. \$22.00.

Holding opinions in a treacherous business for a woman. Shrii! Silly! Imprecations and accusations lurk at the edges of life and female psychology, fueling prejudices and women’s own self-censorship. Feminist writer Naomi Wolf recently called attention to how little women’s opinions figure in our op-ed pages, journals, public affairs shows, and columns, all “strikingly immune to the general agitation for female access.” Gender socialization, suggests Wolf—both what men expect of women and what women expect of themselves—undermines the boldness and self-assertion necessary to a strong public voice.

Opinionated women, it is true, too often still register as in over their heads, presumptuous in proportion to how far they venture outside their proven expertise in matters of personal life.

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Reading any of the tiny number of female opinion journalists who have succeeded, you sense their difficulties in claiming full authority, the temptation to take refuge in a more palatable domestic identity. In Anna Quindlen, the most successful of the circle, the tendency to evoke the accoutrements of conventional femininity is chronic: the kids, the husband, the concern for the needy, the note of girlish pleading. But even in a tough, funny writer like Barbara Ehrenreich, the domestic voice has intruded over the years, the evocation of children's foibles and a comic domestic chaos, as if Jean Kerr were a ghost that couldn't be quite banished.

Katha Pollitt's gift has been an ability to move beyond these limitations and, in doing so, to create a newly imagined space for opinionated women. Both the charming girl and the wacky mom are absent from Pollitt's self-presentation. What emerges rhetorically is rather a fierce female intellectual, unapologetically feminist and utterly intrepid. Pollitt never pulls her punches: as you may note after a moment's reflection, that is rare among women in life as well as in print. As she notes in an aside in an essay reprinted in the collection *Reasonable Creatures*, "[w]e are in a transition period, in which many women were raised with modest expectations and much emphasis on the need to please others." In her columns in the *Nation*, she reminds readers how much more women might reasonably expect for themselves. She also shows how much fun a woman can have when she jettisons, at least literarily, the need to please.

A book composed of columns constitutes something of a contradiction. These pieces derive their energy from their immediacy; they are not expository or reflective but rather served as fuel for fires burning at the time. Fresh from your argument, you read a Pollitt column and, still sizzling with what you might have said, appropriate her thoughts as ammunition for your next encounter. Ferocious, canny, Pollitt is both inspiration and reinforcement for the mundane, bumbling argumentative self. It is this imaginative relationship between writer and reader that led Wolf, after Pollitt's devastating attack on some current piece of

antifeminist palaver, to call her a national treasure.

But by the same token, the essays do not always fare well over time. Passions of the moment fade and the specifics of the controversies become blurry. What was the Baby M case all about? What, exactly, was all the fuss about middle-aged single women not finding husbands? Who was Hedda Nussbaum? In preparing the columns for publication, Pollitt took care to choose those involving issues that resonate beyond the moment—antifeminism, reproductive ethics, sexual abuse. But inevitably her treatment of these deeper concerns is limited by tying them to events that, given the dizzying pace of the news, can seem passé and even, to younger readers, incomprehensible. *Reasonable Creatures* does develop certain lines of argument—Pollitt's concern with an emergent rhetoric of fetal rights, her ongoing broadside against media scandalizing about women, a militant assertion of the value of women's sexual and economic independence. Readers who know little about feminism, however, will not necessarily find an entrée here, since there is no systematic exposition of feminist politics.

What does unify the essays is a luminous voice inflected with a distinct generational sensibility. Politically, Pollitt carries on a line of feminist thinking intermeshed with the democratic left, a long tradition revived by that wing of the women's liberation movement that came out of the 1960s with its ties to the New Left frayed but unbroken. A hallmark of this democratic feminism has been, since the nineteenth century, its resistance to moralistic notions about the supposedly distinct, higher nature of women and their essential differences from men. Pollitt gives a sound drubbing to updated versions of the nobility of Woman rendered by thinkers like Carol Gilligan as a universal ethic of female caregiving and pacific inclinations. Always Pollitt insists on the sexes' shared nature as "reasonable creatures"—the phrase of Mary Wollstonecraft that gives the collection its title. What Wollstonecraft described as a determination "to see women neither heroines nor brutes" sets Pollitt's brand of militance aside from other

strains of feminism. It inoculates her both to the special pleading for women which can mark a liberal like Anna Quindlen and to the melodramatizing of female innocence perpetrated by radicals like Catherine Mackinnon.

But neither does Pollitt give any quarter to the wishful thinking, now fashionable among neoliberals, that confuses sexual egalitarianism as a political goal with a description of life as we know it, if only feminist demagogues would cease to brainwash women. *Reasonable Creatures* is imbued with an awareness of all the structural constraints that militate against women's claiming a full humanity, an understanding of how sexual inequality gets tangled up with economics and class. Traces of a dialogue with Marxism are apparent, not in any ideological language but in an edginess to Pollitt's interest in how the class system breeds a misogyny that eventually bears down on all women. The pieces on surrogate motherhood are a fine instance of how Pollitt can fuse an argument about the exploitation of working-class women with one about the travails of their more privileged sisters. Surrogacy—"checkbook motherhood" is Pollitt's term, rendered with characteristic tartness—is one outcome of an economic system that makes many women so financially hard-pressed that the pittance they are paid for bearing a child seems attractive. "Like all domestic labor performed for pay," Pollitt concludes bitingly, "housecleaning, baby-sitting, prostitution—childbearing in the marketplace becomes disreputable work performed by suspect marginal people. The priceless task [of pregnancy] turns out to have a price after all: about \$1.50 an hour." But what about the infertile women whom these gestational mothers help? Pollitt follows out this objection to the end and reminds us, damningly, that the contracting parties in surrogacy arrangements are not a pregnant woman and an adoptive mother but a pregnant woman and a monied man, the sperm donor, who uses her to preserve his genetic inheritance. "Contract maternity is not a way for infertile women to get children . . . it is a way for men to get children."

At the heart of Pollitt's thought is a critique of the family, developed by the old politics of

women's liberation and elaborated by twenty-five years of subsequent left-wing feminism. This view, bolstered and expanded by the very best of feminist history and social science, has been under attack for the duration, subjected to calumnies so intense that even the most militant are prone, at times, to advertise our own domestic successes as protection against the assumption that anyone who adheres to "that" kind of feminism must despise children and detest men. One of the thrills of reading Pollitt is her refusal to trim her sails with these winds. "Why I Hate Family Values" is a memorable contribution on this score. Here she makes the *au courant* gesture toward her own cozy nest—the essay begins with her reading her daughter a bedtime story—but charmingly subverts it by informing readers that she has recently separated from her husband. No *angst* for the newly single mother. "The family-value advocates would doubtless say that my husband and I made a selfish choice. . . . But I am still waiting for someone to explain why it would be better for my daughter to grow up in a joyless household." She goes on to connect the wave of middle-class breast-beating over divorce and single-parent families with a politics that, on the bottom line, is about the perfidies of vulnerable women. "Family values and the cult of the nuclear family is, at bottom, just another way to bash women, especially poor women. If only they would get married and stay married, society's ills would vanish."

Pollitt's forte is to use this understanding of sexual politics to slash through some controversy shrouded in liberal piety and obfuscation. It is perhaps her proximity to literary and publishing circles in New York City, where she lives, that makes her so shrewd about the eagerness of an enlightened media to sponsor old misogynist myths repackaged as modern sexual *realpolitik*. She has almost a second sense about the wiles of a culture that dishes out equality with a vengeance, formally acknowledging feminist goals yet reproducing social inequalities of gender in ever more duplicitous ways. A delightful piece on the *New York Times's* decision to publish the name

of the victim in the Palm Beach rape trial of William Kennedy Smith is a good example. Why *not* name the woman? she inquires rhetorically and proceeds to lay out the arguments for "fair play" and dismantle them piece by piece. Would not naming rape victims remove the stigma from rape? She crowns her investigation of this particular instance of equality-with-a-vengeance with a dead-on, baleful gaze at the male narcissism and cant that inform it. "One also has to wonder," she muses, "about the urgency with which . . . male proponents of the antistigma theory, with no history of public concern for women, declare themselves the best judge of women's interests and advocate a policy of which they themselves will never have to bear the consequences."

For all that Pollitt is very much a woman of her generation, it is one of her virtues never to look back. Years of conservative reaction have made her feisty and smart rather than morose and maundering. She has created a persona of a middle-aged feminist as beguiling, dashing and cheerful—quite a feat amid a climate so hostile to such personages. The writer drops enough hints about herself to allow readers to sketch in more: an adoring mother of a treasured daughter, unembarrassed user of Clairol to wash out the gray hairs, passionate feminist who counts both men and women as friends.

Pollitt is also a fine poet, too little heard from lately. Years ago she asked in a poem, "What if a woman/is not the moon or the sea?" *Reasonable Creatures* is an exploration of the territory outside metaphor and myth where the value of a woman's life is its own measure. □

Alan Ryan

LEARNING IN AMERICA

DOGMATIC WISDOM, by Russell Jacoby. Doubleday, 1994. 235pp. \$22.95.

Here is a book that is easier to praise and to agree with than to review and to criticize. Its main theme is simple, right, and rather

mysteriously neglected on all sides: the "culture wars" have been an enormous diversion from the serious work of improving American education at all levels. All parties, says Jacoby, have been fiddling while Rome burns:

Conservatives, liberals, and radicals argue over which books should be taught in schools; meanwhile few books are read, and a liberal education shatters under the weight of commercialism. Faculty and students dispute which words violate the rights of which groups; meanwhile society turns increasingly violent. Psychologists preach the virtues of a healthy self-esteem; meanwhile the world of the self—education and jobs—collapses. Citizens wrangle over multiculturalism, arguing how, when, and if diverse cultures should be studied; meanwhile the irresistible power of advertising and television converts multiculturalism into a monoculture of clothes, music, and cars.

Readers of Jacoby's highly regarded *The Last Intellectuals* will recall that he is none too happy that so much of the nation's intellectual life has gone to roost in assorted ivory towers. Here, he is agreeably acerbic about an underreported consequence of this fact—the excessive attention paid to squabbles about the teaching of history and literature in expensive, elite schools, and a corresponding shying away from some grim realities about what goes on in the bottom half of the country's 3,400 institutions of higher education.

Jacoby isn't interested in rehashing terrifying accounts of American education such as Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* or *Illiterate America*; he says that if liberal education is a mess at the college level, it will certainly be a mess at lower levels, but here focuses on higher education for the entirely plausible reason that this is where the "culture wars" have been fought. But his larger aim is simply to stick up for the liberal values that he supposes liberal education should promote. If liberal education is in sad straits, it is because it all too faithfully reflects the sad state of liberalism in the wider society. The tone of the parts of the book addressed to cultural radicals and cultural conservatives alike is thus "a plague on both your houses," but the point

throughout is to stick up for a traditional, egalitarian liberalism in the educational arena.

Jacoby therefore reckons that conservative critics like Allan Bloom and Dinesh D'Souza are partially right about the horrors of American higher education; but they are infinitely less acute than were Abraham Flexner and Irving Babbitt sixty-five years ago. In *Universities*, Flexner pointed out that although students at Columbia *could* get an education in serious subjects, they could also take "elementary stenography," "the writing of advertised copy," and even "wrestling, judo, and self-defense" for credit; it was, he complained, part of a "service station" mentality that all too easily overtook American institutions.

The unstructured curriculum about which Flexner complained has become less structured yet; courses proliferate and universities have no idea which courses students *should* take. Cafeteria-style education is the order of the day, as if we were operating a sort of intellectual Chinese restaurant whose patrons can put together the most amazingly indigestible or uninteresting combinations of items without help from the kitchen or the staff. But, says Jacoby, what makes the conservative critique so feeble is that conservatives think that it's all the fault of leftist professors; the truth is that it's much more the fault of unrelenting commercial and utilitarian pressures. Students who won't read the Great Books don't turn to peace studies or Marxism; they turn to vocational and occupational courses. And we can guess why conservative critics of higher education keep quiet about that trend; sponsored, published, and publicized by conservative foundations, they find it hard to complain about the impact of the sacrosanct free enterprise system.

As Francis Oakley's *Community of Learning* pointed out a couple of years back, the collapse of liberal education is not a phenomenon of the colleges and universities where the very brightest students go, and where the faculty is most energetic in research. Students don't go to Williams or Amherst to get a B.A. in business ed, but only some 3 percent of the student population goes to such places. Most go to community colleges or other public schools

whose tuition is not the \$20,000 a year that Princeton and Harvard charge. They go to get the credentials that will get them a better job. Their education is illiberal in the old sense: utilitarian, job-oriented. Moreover, its shortcomings catch nobody's attention, for America is a country in which it is taken for granted that what is worth bothering about is what catches the public eye, and the everyday difficulties of the worse-off don't.

Jacoby does not sustain his opening note. Having registered the fact that 97 percent of the higher education population is ignored by the Blooms and D'Souzas, and that we are a society that regards culture as so valuable that we don't want the public to spoil it by using it, Jacoby, too, turns to the arguments that have riven the elite schools—multiculturalism, free-speech issues, campus tolerance, the canon, and so on. Although one might feel a bit let down by his turning away from what looked like a promising investigatory vein—what *does* go on in West Los Angeles College?—Jacoby is good on his chosen ground.

He is certainly better than most recent commentators, largely because he is so irritated—by the feebleness of most academic responses to the likes of Kimball, Bloom, and D'Souza; by the stunning hypocrisy of the conservatives; and by the self-regarding, high-priced academic left, whose belief in their own power and importance Jacoby sometimes treats as a delusional state barely short of full-blown dementia. Among the especially enjoyable passages of arms is Jacoby's uninhibited squelching of the more ludicrous and far-fetched claims of a "new McCarthyism" with which conservative critics of political correctness have terrified their readers.

Bloom, for instance, rashly claimed that McCarthyism "had no effect whatsoever on curriculum or appointments . . . Professors were not fired and they taught what they pleased in their classrooms." This appears to understate the firings by about two hundred, and blithely to ignore the pressures to conformism that made so much of American higher education in the 1950s a bad joke. Jacoby observes that it seems particularly odd that the Plato-worshipping Bloom had never noticed that one of America's most distinguished ancient historians, Moses Finley, had been sacked from Rut-

gers in 1952 and spent the rest of his life in England.

Jacoby's argumentative tactics are simple but adequate. Wherever the *Wall Street Journal*, the *National Review*, and the like advance large empirical claims about the spread of repressive speech codes or small empirical claims about the fate of particular professors allegedly sacked for opposition to politically correct dogmas, hirings, or syllabus changes, Jacoby digs out the kernel of truth that usually underlies them. This kernel of truth is frequently unimpressive. Sacked professors turn out to be graduate students who have resigned in pique; students supposedly excluded from courses by angry professors turn out to be students shut out of a section by a student assistant. Moreover, the credentials of the critics of political correctness are unimpressive. The egregious D'Souza is a fan of the Unification Church and the admiring biographer of Jerry Falwell. Falwell's "Liberty University" is something less than an oasis of free inquiry in a naughty world. William F. Buckley began his career with *God and Man at Yale* denouncing the very idea of academic freedom. Censorship is the common coin of the right; the National Rifle Association wanted Ice-T's "Cop Killer" censored, observes Jacoby, even as it defended the citizenry's right to load their weapons with cop-killer ammo.

The fact that most of the noise about political correctness is made by assorted hypocrites, fundamentalists, the hired help of the Olin Foundation, and all the rest is no comfort, however. For the gloomy fact is that the left has to an alarming degree ratted on the ideals of free speech and open inquiry. To observe that they are too few and too thoroughly controlled by their institutions to do much damage is not much reassurance; to observe that they have taken over the attitudes of the conservative and fundamentalist right is to be very unreassured indeed. Even where the desire that we should say the right thing, use the right code words and the rest of it is well intentioned, the results are dire. The desire not to wound, or positively to

enhance self-respect, is simply the enemy of the search for the truth. Jacoby cites a familiar but nonetheless alarming example of what can happen. In an international mathematics test, Japanese and Korean thirteen-year-olds did very well, American thirteen-year-olds very badly. "The children were also asked how well they *thought* they had done. The results showed that American children thought they had done the best of all."

Jacoby's gloom about the upmarket self-described left in academia is spelled out in several chapters of *Dogmatic Wisdom*. At this late stage of the battle, the charges hardly bear repeating—is anyone going to defend the smug enthusiasm for the professionalization of literary studies that Jonathan Culler and Stanley Fish exude, or the self-regarding, ever so hip, but ever so dilute Marxism that Andrew Ross reckons to represent? Still, they are leveled with a decent anger and with a cumulatively depressing effect. The moral is one that seems oddly unregarded these days. Most education is, or properly should be, morally, scientifically, and pedagogically "low-tech," to use Jacoby's apt description; it is not about turning literary studies into the criticism of criticism rather than the study of literature, nor about unmasking oppression, nor about the most narrowly utilitarian goals.

It does not—for the most part, though not entirely—take a lot more than clean classrooms, safe schools, colleges where teachers sympathize with the aspirations of their students and have a desire to enlarge their opportunities. To understand this is to subscribe to a simple materialism, not materialism as a theory of ideology, not materialism as a theory about the relations of minds to brains, but the materialism that insists that a decent society would pay attention to the surroundings in which the next generation of *all* its children are to be brought up. It is a commonplace that conservatives found it easier to go on about the counterculture than to take government seriously for twelve years of wholesale social neglect, but it's a disgrace if liberals and radicals succumb to the same temptation. □

Against Intervention

Editors:

In "Why We Are in Haiti" (Winter 1995), George Packer rightly attacks the implicitly racist isolationism of those right wingers who argued that Haiti is "too poor and irrational" for democracy to take root. Yet his concomitant praise of the "successful" U.S. intervention is naive, and his mocking caricature of the leftist anti-interventionist position is unfair and unsound.

Packer cites an unsophisticated slogan of the sectarian left and a pair of inconsistent lead editorials in the *Nation* (the inconsistency was in fact noted and criticized by several *Nation* readers in a subsequent letters column); he then sweepingly concludes that "the left" lives in "a fantasy world," behind "a thick insulation of unreality," where "an abstract and reflexive habit of mind count[s] for more than actual human suffering."

Yet for all Packer's "realism," he is silent about the ties between the U.S. national security apparatus and Haitian paramilitary death squads, facts which were responsibly reported by left journalists such as Allan Nairn. He sanguinely sees "the last-minute Carter mission" as "a chance to save lives," yet neglects to mention that Carter obscenely portrayed General Cédras as "a man of honor" and voiced more concern about the murderer's human rights than those of his wretched victims. He cites "President Aristide's triumphant return," yet does not point out what those "unrealistic" leftists did—that Aristide was allowed to return on condition that he follow neoliberal austerity measures forced down his throat by the Agency for International Development, the World Bank, etc. In other words, the popular movements that brought Aristide to power in the first place have been subverted by Clinton's "foreign policy victory."

It seems to me, therefore, that it is Packer, not "the left," who evinces a "reflexive habit of mind" by uncritically accepting the Clinton administration's self-serving account of the Haiti intervention. How odd that such a viewpoint should find expression in a magazine called *Dissent*.

DAVID R. ADLER
New York, N.Y.

George Packer Replies:

One can't criticize the right and flatter the left for taking the same position on intervening: against. Today the vocal American left consists of a few national magazines and a

scattering of semi-organized local groups, and my acquaintance with both gives me no reason to change my description of their mental habits. Anyone opposed to the U.S. intervention in Haiti is obliged to answer a simple question: What was the alternative? Were you prepared to see Haitians go on suffering and dying for their democratic desires? Nothing I've read or heard from the anti-intervention left has faced this question honestly. Nothing in David R. Adler's letter suggests that he has either. Readers of *Dissent* don't need to be told that the CIA has been a destructive force in Haiti. Why should that keep us from seeing the constructive role U.S. troops have played since September 19? To deny it is to prefer suspicion and theory to facts. Of course Carter's unctuous comments were disgusting. His negotiations also saved lives, both Haitian and American—another fact, and a more important one than his attraction to Mrs. Cédras. As for Clinton's policy, Adler is wrong: in my article I criticized aspects of it, including the World Bank's gospel. But on the basic question of whether to intervene I supported him and still do. I spent January in Haiti, where there's a great deal of frustration with the slow pace of change. But if neoliberal austerity measures are now the enemy, they're preferable to the Haitian military, which no longer exists. You can speak against the World Bank without getting shot. I asked everyone I met whether they were tired of the American presence and wanted us out. With the exception of a wealthy mulatto woman, everyone said no. This is because, unlike American leftists, they know the alternative, they had to live under it. "Haitians are a grateful people," one woman said, "and we'll never forget that the Americans rid us of these killers." □

Another Question

Editors:

"The Question" posed by Eugene Genovese (Summer 1994), and most of the replies, as in the Winter 1995 issue of *Dissent*, all seem to revolve around "the question" of when each person first discovered the primal scene that created the oedipal disillusionment. Thus my friend Dennis Wrong writes, "I became aware of The Question just after my sixteenth birthday, when the Soviet Union invaded Finland in late 1939. . . . It is often forgotten that the *Nation*, the *New Republic* and the *New Statesman*, all of which I began to read, were anti-Stalinist during this period. . . . So this is an old story. . . ."

May I put in a word for the *New Leader*, of which I

was the managing editor from 1941 to 1944 (at a time, in part, when Irving Howe was editing *Labor Action*,) which was the *fons et origo* of anti-Stalinism since 1924. I remember, too, a conversation, ca. 1933–34, after I had joined the Young People's Socialist League, with Sergius Ingerman, a member of the Menshevik delegation, on why the Militants of that period (such as Gus Tyler) were going "left" without realizing what had happened in the Russian Revolution. I was sympathetic to that, for it was at that time, because of the influence of some anarchist cousins, that I had "discovered" Kronstadt, and the fact that Trotsky had ordered the shooting of the Kronstadt sailors, and the day afterward had given a speech commemorating the martyrs of the Paris Commune.

The point of all this is why did not the young zealots read and learn about the history of revolutions, and why, as Michael Walzer has put it, did one, and does one, see the continual "process of enchantment," and the aching need to embrace revolutionary romanticism, which recurs time and again.

DANIEL BELL
Cambridge, Mass. □

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The Last Page

If this were a nineteenth-century book and not a modern magazine, the last few entries of a lengthy, cluttered index might appear right here, listing every conceivable and inconceivable topic along with the appropriate page number. We see very few indexes like that anymore. Books published by commercial publishers today tend to have no index at all, and the books that are published by university presses contain miserable shrunken indexes of a mere seven or eight or perhaps fifteen pages, but not more, which, from a nineteenth-century point of view, is brevity itself. (In modern academic tomes, it is the bibliography that runs on forever—not the index.) And yet, from time to time the old nineteenth-century inspiration does seize a modern publisher, and you turn to the back of a fresh new book, and the double columns of little print deploy across an astounding number of pages, and you discover at once a rare but not lesser joy of reading.

Here is the new biography of Dwight Macdonald by Michael Wreszin, published by Basic Books. The book is called *A Rebel in Defense of Tradition: The Life and Politics of Dwight Macdonald*, and proceeds for 564 pages, which is long. But on page 565 the index begins, precisely as you would expect it to do (“Aaron, Daniel, 554n15”), except that it keeps doing for twenty-five additional pages of tiny print and tinier arcana. “Macdonald, Dwight,” the biographee himself, receives three and a half pages of listings, divided into subsets that constitute a mini-biography of their own, beginning: “CHARACTERISTICS: anglophilia, 7, 307, 310–13; appearance of letters, 14, 521n4; attitude about having affairs, 35, 258–59; attitudes toward Jews, 11, 111–12, 228–32, 483; attitudes toward women, 7,

24–26, 243.” And the thing is already a must-read.

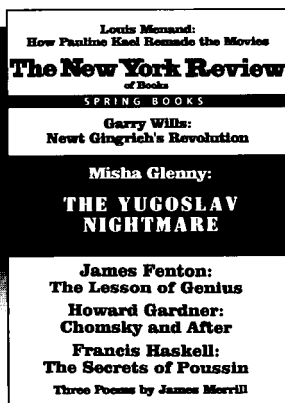
Why do so few nineteenth-century-style grand-scale indexes appear in books today? Computers have made indexing a far simpler task than was ever the case in the past, so the problem cannot really be the expense. I think a misunderstanding is at work. People worry that massive indexes advertise a volume’s dullness. But that is an error. Massive indexes are lightness itself. You read an index the way you click a remote control at a television set. The dull parts of a book are the ordinary chapters, which you must plod through a page at a time. But indexes are for channel surfing. Your eye lights upon “attitude about having affairs,” followed instantly by “attitudes toward Jews.” And so, with the right-hand thumb holding down the index page at the back, the left-hand thumb surfs through the text, and in that manner a book is read, not very thoroughly, perhaps. But not all pleasures are thorough, as the booklovers of the nineteenth century knew.

It is always imagined today that something in the human brain has been lost in our high tech culture, that we have become frivolous where once we were grave, that television—worse, the remote control switch—is the symbol and culprit of every lamentable downward development in the human soul. But that is doubtful. Every new technology replaces an older technology that used to be no different. Today, the remote control; yesterday, the index. The downward development of culture is actually a permanent depressed plateau. Humanity has always needed food and shelter and pleasant company; and humanity has always flicked through whatever entertainment is at hand, looking for the good parts.

PAUL BERMAN □

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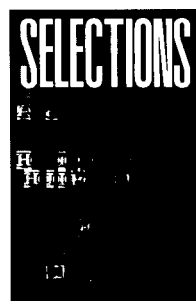
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